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HEARTS AFLAME

SERMONS AND ADDRESSES
ON
LIFE RELIGION AND LITERATURE

BY

J. WOODSIDE ROBINSON

B.A., Hon. C.F.

Minister of Cadger Parish, Scotland

Author of

'The Soldier's Cry,' 'Sunlit Hopes'

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TO
THE UNFORGOTTEN MEMORY
OF
TWO BENEFICENT LIVES
ALEXANDER AND MRS M'VICKER
LATE OF LONDONDERRY
AND TO THE
ELDERS AND MEMBERS
OF
CADDEN PARISH CHURCH
IN RECOGNITION OF
A HAPPY MINISTRY
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

*Printed in Great Britain
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh*

PREFACE

THESE sermons or addresses were, in the first instance, delivered in Cadder Pulpit, and are printed practically as they were preached.

My reason for giving them a wider publicity is the earnest desire, very strongly expressed by many, both in word and letter, for another volume similar to my last, "Sunlit Hopes."

If "Hearts Aflame" be as helpful to preachers and others who read it, that will be my best reward.

J. WOODSIDE ROBINSON

THE MANSE OF CADDER
Near GLASGOW

"Heaven's gate is shut to him who comes alone ;
Save thou a soul, and it shall save thine own."

J. G. WHITTIER

"The world is waiting ; it is white already
to the harvest. It is looking for mercy and
justice and honour. It is seeking *hearts aflame*
with love to lead it back to God."

See p. 20

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THE LEAVINGS FOR GOD

*"And the residue thereof he
maketh a God."*

(ISA. xliv. 17.)

I

THE LEAVINGS FOR GOD

IT is affirmed by some people that this age is losing a great deal of its reverence for religion ; and there are not a few, even in the Roman Catholic belief, who are distressed by this want of respect for Authority in matters of the Faith. It would appear that the trouble arises in the minds of men because they have lost faith in what they hitherto have held to be religion. There is too often a big dose of superstition in the thoughts of religious people, while in their inmost hearts there is no spiritual faith at all. Some openly religious people would as soon think of sitting down at a table of thirteen as they would sit in a menagerie. There are many who would refuse to walk under a ladder for no other reason than that they consider it unlucky.

There are even many professedly Christian worshippers in the Highlands of Scotland and elsewhere who would refuse utterly to enter a church where instrumental music is used and hymns are sung in the worship. It is a belief or

a superstition, if you wish, that holds them. If it is an ethical belief, that is different, but if it is just a superstitious feeling in their religion, without real faith, people are much better to throw off the cloak altogether. When there is real religion, a living faith in the heart, there is no lack of reverence.

The burden of the prophets of Israel was the superstitious idolatry of the people; to relieve that burden they took several means of arousing them to a sense of reality. It was extremely difficult, as every occasion demanded a particular remedy. Their special work was to keep the people true to the Eternal God. When they lapsed, they denounced their apostasy, and when they worshipped graven images, they hurled against this superstition, scathing, biting ridicule.

In the instance referred to in the text Isaiah holds up in the light of ridicule the idea that a carved piece of a tree can be of any value to a man: even the process of idol making and idol worship is made a laughing-stock before the idolater's eyes. "What is your idol?" asks the prophet. "Once it was a tree; then it was cut down into sections and carried off. Part of it the man burns in the fire to cook his meat and warm himself and says, 'I am satisfied. I feel the glow!' The remainder he turns into an

idol, a god, and bows down crying, praying to it, 'Save me, for thou art my god.' " Then Isaiah writes, as it were, under the ancient cartoon, " The half was burned into ashes, the remainder was made into a wooden god. Will ashes satisfy a man duped by superstition? Is he not worshipping something false and vain? " The prophet pours ridicule on the idol worshippers' superstition—that a god created by a human hand, however clever, had power to help or save.

Every true prophet of Israel was heart sore, like Isaiah, and righteously indignant against the superstition of idol worship, and against a religion that could take the best for self always and throw the rest, the leavings, to their God. They saw their Hebrew brothers marching to their shame, and their land of Israel plunging into open disgrace.

The patriot's heart is always rent when his country is losing mental balance. John Drinkwater says, " He serves us best who sings but what he sees." Isaiah sang with tears in his voice of what he saw—idolatry, stupid and superstitious, leading to obscene, impure, disgraceful results.

I wish we could see a modern prophet like Isaiah or Ezekiel who would hurl ridicule at our doors and teach us the meaning of Iconoclasm, or the

method of shattering our idols—one who could at least fan the flame of desire into our hearts to test our religious beliefs, and if they be idolatrous or superstitious, give us some push to shatter them and drive them out of existence. It is a poor kind of religion that will keep a man from singing a hymn but will not prevent him from traducing his neighbour's character. It is very unlike the honour taught in Christ's words, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

" So many gods, so many creeds,
So many paths that wind and wind,
While just the art of being kind
Is all this sad world needs."

The ache at the prophet's heart was caused by the knowledge that the superstitious idol worship was antagonistic to the ideal of progress. And how could a people, who once knew the true God, progress by forgetting Him, or by throwing the dregs to Him, or by worshipping a twisted piece of pine? A nation must either progress or die, so must the Church of God.

There are many modern beliefs, or movements, but are they movements of progress? Progress in religion is the assurance that it is getting better and is making men and women truer and

more like the spiritual idea of God—the idea that Jesus gave us of Him. For thirty years He lived and toiled at Nazareth almost unknown. Then the life of God the Father worked in Him for three years incessantly. In acts and words and sacrifice He gave to men the ideal of God. He Himself was that ideal. He poured out in preaching and praying His very life for man long before He shed His life-blood on the Cross, to show that God was in Him, the Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. “For their sakes I sanctify Myself. That they all may be one as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee.” He showed the Image Divine. It was that glorious Personality that led Livingstone into the jungle, and to the depraved and darkened souls of Africa, singing, it is said, as he travelled :

“ Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast ;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.”

I wonder what idol have some people in Livingstone's native village substituted for that Presence sublime ! It is exceedingly difficult to get at the true knowledge of what many people are now thinking of Christ.

[In the eighteenth century a man called John

Walker started a political movement in England. A large party gathered round him. As time went on his followers became dangerous cranks and extremists, and called themselves "Walkerites." John Walker himself found it necessary to protect his name, and he began to explain everywhere he went that he was not a "Walkerite." It is a pertinent thought that if Christ came to Glasgow and saw the grotesqueness of much of what a great many call Christianity, might He not have to defend His own teaching and exclaim, "I, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, am not a Christian."

There are, unfortunately, too many people belonging to Episcopal and Nonconformist churches in England who seldom, if ever, enter the Church or take Communion except at Easter or Christmas. And there are, perhaps, just as many in Presbyterian Scotland who seldom sit in their church pews except to partake of Holy Communion. Is such an attitude Christian? Surely we need some iconoclast to shatter unreality and banish superstition out of Christianity—an Isaiah, to speak to Modernists and say, "With much of your modern belief you have warmed yourselves, enjoyed its comforts, seized its benefits, and the remainder you have formed into a god."

There is something glorious in reverence for the past. There is fragrance of romance in

keeping memory green. It is a sacred instinct that urges men to reverence the Bibles their fathers handled, and the likenesses their mothers left; the little house where Burns was born; the Bible Cromwell carried to the battle of Marsden Moor; and the spot where Mary Stuart was beheaded. Few can think on such things without keen emotion, thrills of feeling, and reverence for the imperishable past. Men revere such memories—memories which write on the heart some letters of eternity. All true men and women reverence the Cross—the symbol of His holy passion. That is reverence, not worship. They worship the Christ whose sacred body was nailed to the tree. The Israelites carved the residue, the leavings of a piece of tree, and made it in the likeness of man and fell down to it as to a god. When that stage is reached it is imperative to destroy the idol and the memory.

With the residue, the remainder, the Israelites made a god. That is to say, the part they had no more use for, they set apart for worship. It has been so all down the ages. The leavings are given by some to the Almighty; the best, the richest, the earliest, the freshest years or gifts are lavished on sins and pleasures and thoughtless ease; and when these are spent forces, the residue is given to God. How can there be pro-

gress in the Church when the command, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," is left to the end, and then

"The dream

Is broken which held us unaware,
And with a shudder we feel our naked soul
In the great black world, face to face with God."

Men make many false steps in life and some bad investments, but from every view-point this leaving the remainder for God is their very worst investment. Reading the history of the Hebrews we see it. When they invested in a golden calf and turned God down, they blundered. When the leadership of Moses was refused and they cried for flesh instead of God, they blundered. When they turned their back on the faithful Abraham, who gave them Canaan, and invested in heathen rites instead of in a righteous God, they blundered. And had it not been for the few in Israel—the Prophets, the Isaiahhs, the Joshuas, and the Samuels—who kept the Almighty first always, they would have disappeared from history for ever.

The worst investment for this world and the next, is to purchase a bond in the kingdom of heaven with the leavings of one's money or life. The true way of real Christianity is to give the

first and best to God. Because that has been done in so many cases, Christianity has been successful, and it has been eminently successful, or it would not have penetrated every known land. This result has been achieved because a few men and women at the beginning and all down the ages since have given their hearts, their best, their all, to God : invested even life itself in His cause.

Think of this for a moment, and the audacity of that little band of fishermen listening to Christ on the night of His betrayal. They were a contemptible little army in the eyes of the Roman power and the Jewish Hierarchy. But they had heard Christ's voice and had left their all—not much indeed, some ramshackle boats and nets, but it was everything they had—and were all in all for Christ who said to them on that last night of parting, “ Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” I have no time to expand that idea, but that contemptible little band conquered the greatest power in the world—the might of the Roman Empire. Why? Was it because they gave the old torn nets and boats for Jesus' service—the remainders, their castaways? No! they triumphed because they gave their best, their all, yea, their very lives, for Christ and men. And it is just because so many are like them still, in

this proud modern world—giving not the residue or refuse of life, but their all, to advance His kingdom—that His Church is still triumphant, and must ever guide and lead and brighten the world. The world is waiting ; it is white already to the harvest. It is looking for mercy and justice and honour. It is seeking hearts aflame with love to lead it back to God.

THE AUDACITY OF FAITH

*" He walked on the water, to
go to Jesus."*

(MATT. xiv. 29.)

II

THE AUDACITY OF FAITH

IF you will think about the first little band of believers who had gathered round the Christ and listened to His teaching and devoted their all to God, and had set out after He had gone from them to win the world for His Kingdom, you will realise that their faith must have exceeded their powers. They did not think so. Their faith was not only irrepressible, it was audacious in their circumstances. Think then of the audacity of the faith of these men—a faith that was irresistible in the face of the Roman power (a power that made all nations quake), and stood up to that power, defied and conquered it.

Peter's confidence in Jesus had led him out on the sinking sea and he walked with perfect confidence while his eyes were fixed on his Lord. The faith of the Apostle Paul was just the same. He was "always confident" in whom he had believed. It was the same urgent trust that made John and Peter affirm their faith in Jesus'

power to heal when they said to the Sanhedrim, "We cannot but speak."

In the case of Peter walking on the water, he was voluntarily by act affirming his confidence in Christ. The others at different times acted in similar fashion. They were compelled not by any external force, but by some irresistible inward power. The marvellous things they had seen and heard were embedded in their hearts, and no earthly authority could restrain them from personal deed and word.

It was tried right along their history, and we must remind ourselves that they were not great, nor wealthy, nor powerful, nor friendly with the "powers that be." Nor were they different from other men. Before Jesus came on the scene, they were like other young men, in the glory of strength, irrepressible in joy and laughter, loving their parents, and fearing God and worshipping Him in the Temple. Then they met Jesus and followed Him. Life became very real to them then; it took on a deeper meaning, a rejuvenescence that their Christless eyes had never seen before. They all had thoughts of God before—not one of them was irreligious, not even Judas at the first, else he would not have been attracted by the Christ; but contact with Him must either make men good or despicable.

In all the rest it awakened hope, and joy, and love, and courage that they had sometimes dreamt about and longed to realise.

“A young man’s fancy” which dreams of days unending and joys unutterable kept whirling round their hearts as their boats kept tossing on the Sea of Galilee. As the mists gathered into the darkened night, a voice came rolling over the waters, and chaos and night were gone. As the dawn came crawling from the East, spreading with countless fingers its crimson and violet colouring over the dancing waves, the fiat of a man whose voice they knew before—the fiat of Love Divine came into their clean simple hearts, and life for them began, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

They loved their calling, their boats and their homes, but the divine urge thrilled them, and the resistless call of the Christ summoned them to a life that was highest of all. They had found at last the greatest height, the height on which Christ stands. They had been roused out of a dream-sleep into a great awakening.

“What words can tell what other day and place,
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of Him?
He needs me—calls me—loves me—let me go.”

They recognised that the first step was to leave

all for God and give their all to Him. They obeyed that magnificent instinct with the audacity of faith. Remember some of them were little more than boys. John was not much more than twenty-one. James was very young, so were Philip, Andrew and Bartholomew. They were not much more than lads with "dreams of love upon their beardless lips." Yet they set out to accomplish what only the vision of faith and youth could dare. What was it? It was to conquer the world for Christ and bring in the Kingdom of God. What a task was set them when He said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The fearlessness of faith and youth alone could dare attempt it.

Most of their comrades and contemporaries considered them extremely foolish. Paul, who heard Christ's voice on the road to Damascus and followed Him ever after with sublime confidence, said that Christians were called fools. "So be it," said he, "we are fools for Christ's sake."

It looked foolish to leave home and a living and comfort, for the bare hills, cold charity and discomfort. But looking back, who would dare to affirm that they were not justified! Had they not responded to the call of faith, Peter

might have had a big fleet, and houses, and money, but what about all that? We should never have heard of him, or of his walking on the waves; nor could we, with misty eyes, have seen the big tears rolling down his cheeks, after that lapse of nerve that speaks to every human heart; nor could we have had his last audacious act of faith when he gave his life, on an upturned cross, rather than deny his Lord.

John might have become rich, and settled in a peaceful home, with all life's comforts around him. Well, what about all that? If he had refused the call, we should never have read the greatest love story in all the world, in the third chapter of his Gospel, that "God so loved the world," nor could we have listened with moistened eyes and chastened hearts to the glowing words, from "the Revelation," of the prisoner of Patmos, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more . . . for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Paul might have been a Rabbi, or a great professor like Gamaliel, or reached the highest place in Jewry, had he not heeded the call of Christ. Well, what if he had? We might have been in heathen darkness had he not obeyed Christ's command to go into all the world on

those momentous missionary journeys ; and we should never have read his glorious letters to the Churches, and his courageous words not only to the Churches but to the powers of Rome. " Nothing—nor life nor death—nothing shall separate us from the love of God, for we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Their going out on the high seas of faith was a risk, an adventure, an audacious hazard, but they kept their piercing eyes on One who looked on all of life and not one little part. The blindness and the curse of present-day religion is just this. Professed followers of Christ will look at nothing except a part of life, a mere segment of the whole circle, and that section hardly ever goes beyond their own selfish little interest. We must see beyond. Our eyes must be cleansed to look like John over the great seas to worlds beyond ; and like Paul to look further away than pleasures to the Alpine heights of the pure Son of God.

They required every atom of their audacity both of faith and youth in the years that followed. The testing time was at hand. Jesus was yet with them. His personality appealed to them—the idealism of His teaching, and the reality of His merciful deeds went straight to their hearts. But He had to leave them soon and told them so :

“ Yet a little while I am with you.” And what would life be without Him? How could they face its stupid pleasures, its follies, and its make-believe in their own little place?

“ What’s this dull town to me?
Robin’s not near.”

The “ acid test ” was coming. What would they do when He was not near?

A leader always looks far ahead, and Jesus was the greatest Leader of men the world has ever known. So He looks ahead and His thoughts are brimful of love and care for them, and He tries to prepare them. The very last recorded words He spoke to them were an urgent command and a loving promise: “ Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Glorious commission and gracious promise!

For every adventure of faith, the Son of God gives a plighted promise of His presence. For every battle, He gives a sword; for every bereavement, He sends a solace. For His personal absence, He gives His spiritual presence. “ Lo, I am with you.”

The Church at times has lost its sense of the spiritual presence of the Master, but the early

disciples never lost it. It kept them true and brave and made them defy the Roman power, the Jewish Sanhedrim, the wild beasts in the Coliseum and the brutish taunts of men.

The whole history of the early Church is a history of the audacity of faith. Every achievement was impossible had these weak mortals not been strengthened by the real presence of their Lord. As they went forward into a world that hated and mocked and killed them, they found the faith of Jesus a rock whose foundations grew stronger as they pressed the heavier on it; and always in every crisis they were certain of the Rock of Ages.

“ In the hour of death, after this life’s whim,
When the heart beats low, and the eyes grow dim,
And pain has exhausted every limb—
The lover of the Lord shall trust in Him.”

In the heated fiery furnace, Daniel and his companions had a Comrade whose form was like the Eternal Son. In the Valley of the Shadow, the sweet Psalmist sang, “Thou art with me.”

And Peter and Paul and Polycarp, and all the martyrs, were sure of the Real Presence of their Lord. This perpetual nearness of Christ lay back of all the apostles’ daring—an impetus, a motive, a challenge to their faith. The audacity of their

faith sprang from their certainty of the faithful Son of God.

The apostles and disciples and great men of the past have fallen, and the aged men and women are slipping off their armour and the burdens of life day by day. Who will come forward to carry on? Who among our young men and women to-day will invest in the promises of God and follow the flag of Christ in the audacity of faith? Remember the future is with you. Christ trusts you to save the world that the men of old conquered, and keep it for Him. It rests with you. The Christian world is full of adventure. You live in these great times. A mighty chance is yours. Will you grasp it? Life is full of this grand opportunity to do and be something with a purpose of faith.

“ One great aim like a guiding star above
Which tasked strength, wisdom, stateliness, to lift
Their manhood to the height that takes the prize.”

**THE CHARITY OF INFINITE
KNOWLEDGE**

"And though I . . . understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, . . . and have not charity, I am nothing."

(1 COR. xiii. 2.)

III

THE CHARITY OF INFINITE KNOWLEDGE

IN "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," Dr Holmes says, that whenever two men are engaged in conversation there are really six men present. There is the man as his friend pictures him. There is the man as he pictures himself to be. And there is also the real man known only to his Maker. The other men are ideal in each case. A friend does not know him; he does not know himself. No man can perfectly know another, and though it is one of the oldest advices, "man know thyself," it is never actually and fully accomplished. The real man—man perfectly discovered and understood—is known only to his Maker. Perhaps it is a wise dispensation of Providence, for there are some burdens men carry very badly, and the heaviest burden of life might be absolute knowledge of ourselves and others. The apostle Paul says, "Though I have all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing." You, of course, know that the word

translated charity here really means love in the original text.

To most human beings, it would appear a counsel of impossibility, for all knowledge, which includes of course secret knowledge, both good and bad, is usually the death-trap of love. Human nature, being what it is, and the world constituted as it is, there are in most lives, and often in those one may least suspect, dark thoughts, follies, sins, and errors that stain and pollute the heart. There are passing in the personality of every one deep and secret mysteries, that the world and even closest friends had better never know. There may not be in any of these anything really evil in God's sight, but in the limited judgment and understanding of the individual, mistakes are made and forecasts wrongly construed; and instead of the virtue of charity there might be ringing in many ears the bells of hate, should even closest friends know all that is hidden in the heart. It is not the first time that confession has shattered for ever friendships that appeared welded together in an unbreakable bond; but perhaps had there been that perfect love of which Paul speaks, infinite knowledge would have extended perfect forgiveness. "Though I have all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing."

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This appears to most of us a counsel of perfection. Some great writers and dramatists get a clear insight into character. Shakespeare saw into the depths of passion and motive, and sounded the possibilities of good and evil, and once in a while he pointed the way to One who knew all and yet had compassion. But knowledge like this, acquired by a man of the world, is often detrimental to charity. It may make him cynical. If he sees a man given to generous deeds, he says there is behind it all an interested motive. When he beholds a man going into public life as a benefactor, he immediately calls it ambition. If any one displays Christian philanthropy, he labels him a Pharisee. But the really great men in literature and life can see meanness, and cruelty, and pride, and have a feeling of repulsion that only refined natures know; and yet there is running through the heart the deep yearning of charity.

There is a French proverb which says that he who would work for his fellows should see as little as possible of them. This expresses in succinct wording the thought that one's fellow-mortals are worthless, and the deeper you probe into their lives, you know it the better. There is some good in mankind, and you may work for your fellows to bring it out, but don't

scrutinise the inner springs too closely. It is very cynical, but like most proverbs, there is a lot of truth hidden in it. If workers for human progress knew their fellows absolutely, no doubt they would be disappointed. Philanthropists have too often discovered that to know even a little of them goes a long way to bring disillusionment; and even workers for the highest ideal—the ideal Christ left with His followers—have too often to admit that they are disappointed with apparent results. If they should for a day forget their great Teacher, they would conclude from their knowledge of advance that the crass folly of the world is hopeless. But remembering their Lord, they know what the world ignores, the enormous power of human sin, and the comparative worthlessness of social palliatives, unless there are radical cures. Radical cures are spiritual and must go deep down to the heart—springs of human motive and action.

In the *English Review*, ex-President Wilson diagnosed the cause of the “universal unrest and perturbation,” and summed it up by saying that our civilisation can be saved “only by becoming permeated with the spirit of Christ.” They were remarkable words from a layman and politician. The profoundest need of the world is real Christianity, that kind of unselfish charit-

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able life that Jesus came to plant in the heart of man. That is the radical cure we need so much to-day. Man needs God and God needs man—Christianised man—to renovate His world. Although He knows man absolutely through and through, heart and life, folly and failure, yet God needs man—his highest creation; and trusts him to save the world, because there is in the great heart of God the charity of infinite knowledge.

The good that is in man comes from God, and the evil and low and objectionable things have gathered around him through heredity and environment of the ages. So-called saints even are not immune from faults. St Teresa is reported to have said that she saw one good thing in the world, namely, that it would not condone the faults of saints, and that the power of its murmurs made them the more perfect.

“Though I have all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing.”

The fiercest criticism the world has to offer is against the man or woman who endeavours to live a higher or holier life than their neighbours. Parsons and Church members come in for the fiercest uncharity. A good Christian man may go on for years doing hundreds of beautiful Christlike deeds, and no notice is taken. Then

he does one bad deed and the papers herald it with spite and hate. One black spot on a pure white background makes a fine advertisement. Even if the black spot isn't there, the world can imagine it. The early Christians were good and great, but not without faults, yet according to the tradition and writings of their enemies, as Justin Martyr has said, they were "living in wicked self-indulgence" and made out a pack of scoundrels.

The man who has charity in judging others will endeavour to think of the morals of the time, of particular environment, hereditary leanings, and stress of temptation and temperament. There are in the best of men special temptations consequent on particular temperaments. The faith of Jesus Christ is not, I know, a matter of temperament, but some of the greatest leaders in the world were fired by faith, and this touched the springs of emotion and made them capable of moving the hearts of multitudes and influencing them to noble service. Faith in its fullest form is an ecstasy. The saints in all ages knew it. These great souls were all Bohemians in the way of religion; they had the soul of the religious artist; they were tuned to the delicate fine undertones of life. An inward spirit heard melodies and their tongues pleaded with men; and men listened and thousands of them turned

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to God. But the price must be paid—for such a temperament is certain to have reaction—and must be exacted in days of moral despondency, as it was in Hartley Coleridge's life. Often indeed a man, after high spiritual exaltation, finds himself in grips with evil, hideous, tempting realities, which leave repulsive failures behind. His very exaltations in spirituality are his danger. If such a saint slips, the world laughs and condemns and criticises. The critics do not have all knowledge of his temperament and yet they stir up hate. "Though I have all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing."

There are others, the very reverse of saints—careless sinners men would call them—condemned to an underworld without charity. People have watched a man, careless, vicious, indifferent to pleadings of mother and warnings of father and friends. There is nothing good in him. He is a waster and a coward, people say. But a crisis comes—the mother's death, and the Great War's call. The hurricane and clash of arms have roused him, and in the roar of the storm and the havoc of war he covered a bad name with glory and is enrolled in the Nation's history.

The girl in the next street to you—vain, frivolous, light and irreligious—is utterly useless; then suddenly, sickness, sorrow, and death enter

the home and there emerges out of a careless butterfly a splendid heroine. "Though I have all knowledge and have not charity, I am nothing."

Even knowing all, we cannot judge without love.

We have the finest model of this in our Divine Lord. He knew all His followers through and through. Peter who failed Him, Thomas who doubted, Judas who sold Him ; and yet to them all to the end He was kind, tender, compassionate, and amazingly charitable.

An earthly court of justice is always hampered by imperfect knowledge ; not so the heavenly. God, the supreme Judge, knows all. He has all knowledge and yet has infinite love : His love never faileth. So we trust in that love to suffer long and be kind till earth's shadows flee away.

THE COVENANT

*"I will be their God, and
they shall be My people."*

(JER. xxxi. 33.)

IV

THE COVENANT

THE old theologians used to speak a great deal about the covenant relationship between God and His people. The kernel of the thought got into the very heart of the Christian faith and the soul of the people till the time of the Puritan revolt. It was at its height in the Covenanting times, when men and women took vows to be true to God and the faith they had accepted. It implied an alliance, or a bond, or covenant between two or more. It was to be kept sacred. It was rooted in the inner life of the soul. To keep this sacred pledge men were willing to die, and many of them did lay down their lives in the glens and highlands against Claverhouse rather than break their plighted troth.

Most people think in terms of contempt of men or women who break the vow of marriage faithfulness, which, although a secular contract, is really, in the Churches' teaching, a spiritual pledge of a higher relationship.

There are pledges sometimes made for us by

relatives, or others ; and we are born into covenants, some of which are very galling, others very agreeable. Most of us are linked with ties of brotherhood and sisterhood ; with the blood of race and kinship ; and with the faith of fathers and the loyalty of country. We cannot get rid of these, however bad they may seem, without a pang, and when they are good, as they often are, they bind us in loving, irrevocable chains. No man can break faith of birth, or blood, or love, or country, without a sense of humiliating dishonour. Fidelity is at the heart of every friendship, every secular and international contract, every partnership, and every covenant. The plain man or woman understands the vow of fidelity. In a manner, infinitely higher is the relationship between God and His people. It is a sacred bond between Him and His own. " I will be their God, and they will be My people."

The bond of creation is implied, and God is a faithful Creator. The bond, however, applies to both parties—to creature as well as Creator. There are many, too many these days, who are just the sport of the world. They have not one idea of the relationship existing between them and the Creator, God. Is it any wonder faces are marked by discontent, countenances full of broken vows, and hearts sore with frustrated

hopes? Something is wrecking the very soul of them. An old man once said to a youth setting out in life, "Remember life will either soften your heart, or it will harden it; or else it will break it." There is only one experience in which life can break a man's heart, and that is when he forgets God, his Creator. Whatever experiences in life we may have to face, battles, bitterness, or bereavements, they can be met and conquered with satisfaction when we know that we are creatures of a God who cannot fail.

That pathetic old song says:

"If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
Mother o' mine,
I know whose love would come down to me,
Mother o' mine, o' mine."

And yet there is tenderness in a mother's heart second only to that of the Creator God.

The bond that binds us to God in creation should be held in sacred honour and strength. It is kept so through the tie of faithfulness. There are many to-day dreaming of life, but they have neither anchor nor plan. They dream of pleasure, wealth, leisure; and to realise their dreams they are pinning their faith to some demagogue or will-o'-the-wisp, that will lead them into a mirage, and their dreams have never come

true, and can never come true while life's real meaning is lost. Such gods are not worthy of men's trust.

There is a great deal of depression and uncertainty everywhere to-day, and there must be a reason for it. Is it not because the sense of relationship between God and man is lost ?

There is a beautiful, though humorous, story told about Catherine von Bora, the wife of Luther. He was sometimes depressed, like most of God's servants who are alive to the wrongs and sins of the world and the lack of power in his own soul to cope with it. One morning Catherine dressed in mourning and Luther was astonished and asked her reason for it.

"Do you not know," she said, "God in heaven is dead."

"What nonsense," said Luther. "How can God die ? He is immortal, and will live through all eternity."

"Is that really true ?" she asked.

"Of course ; how can you doubt it ? As surely as there is a God in heaven so sure is it that He can never die."

"And yet," she said quietly, "you are so hopeless and discouraged."

Luther felt the rebuke of a wise woman and conquered his pessimism.

We walk through the fields of life too often as if God were dead, and without a thought for Him who affirms, "I will be your God."

There have been innumerable romances woven round the subject of keeping the faith, or fidelity to a person or a cause or a place. Flora Macdonald's and Jean Armour's romances of fidelity will live as long as history. The romance of John G. Paton for love of God's creatures in the New Hebrides will never die. Randall's poem, "My Maryland," touches every true patriot's heart :

"I hear the distant thunder-hum
Maryland !
The old Line's bugle, fife and drum
Maryland !
She is not dead, nor deaf nor dumb ;
Huzza ! she spurns the Northern scum !
She breathes ! she burns ! she'll come !
She'll come !
Maryland, my Maryland ! "

There is no book so full of the romance of love and faith as the Book of God. The fidelity of God to His loved ones runs through the sacred writings from Genesis to Revelation. It runs through the books of history, and even through the broken, sin-stained lives of men. The greatest romance on earth is reported by the Apostle John.

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

God is a faithful Creator. He has an infinitely higher relationship; He is pledged to His people by a Father's love. Many a boy is unconscious of a father's love till he grows up and has learned how great has been the sacrifices of that father. We are touched by all he did and all he gave for us. Our hearts are not yet fully aware of God's love, and we are still seeking the lost chord, still on an endless search dreaming of a palace we cannot enter till the Son of God's love, the express Image of the Father, hands to us the key—the key of faith—to solve life's mysteries, its desires and its cares. It is the real interpreter of a Father's heart, a Creator's care. It gives us the virtue of fidelity to everything that is true, loving, godlike, and Christward in the world. “They will be to Me a people.”

Why did Joseph keep true to God and faithful to His ideals in the midst of sensual vices and godless intrigues? Why did Stephen stand up to the cutting, killing stones, rather than deny His love? Fidelity to a God who was as true and real to them as life itself. If we want to be really His people, covenanted, pledged, betrothed to Him and His cause, we must keep true to the

bond. There are two parties at least to every contract, to every bond. Throughout all history God has been true to His pledge ; He has never failed His loved ones ; He has been true to the bond. We must hold sacred our part of the pledge to do His will and keep the faith, and fulfil His purpose in every chance and place. When we give our lives to God, we put ourselves in the covenant, and our names are written in the bond. Every Church member has placed himself in the charter, and every Christian man or woman has an assignment in the indenture. It is written in the bond. We have bound ourselves to God, and He has bound Himself to us by ties that are safe and secure and established for ever.

When we have found a faith, a security, a pledge like this, life should be steadfast because it is yielded to the knowledge of God's will.

When "Adam Bede" was describing the career of Moses he summed it up in brief, saying, "Moses carried a hard business well through" ; and the sacred Scriptures give us the clue—"He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." He kept the faith, he was true to the bond ; and God on His part was faithful to the bond and beyond. Of this life, we may know too much, but we can know so little of the life beyond.

I think it was Pascal who said, "The last act is always a tragedy: we shall die alone." But Pascal had forgotten the pledge, "I will be a God to them." No matter what is shadowy and passing, one thing is certain, one Friend is eternally faithful, one love will never fail us either at death or beyond. Having loved His own, He loved them to the uttermost. That means to the uttermost of time, and beyond, through all eternity.

THE PAIN OF REACTION

*" Simon Peter saith unto
them, I go a-fishing. They say
unto him, We also go with thee."
(JOHN xxi. 3.)*

V

THE PAIN OF REACTION

ALL men and women with high resolve and sanctified purpose coursing through the mind, face some time or other inexplicable tests and extraordinary experiences. These are inevitable. A brave soul meets them in the spirit of heroism, a fearing heart faces them in the spirit of faith, and a lonely life may have to meet these in a lowered moral temperature, and pessimistic brooding. Elijah had to face these when spiritual life was relaxed and the sands of faith were running low, and the high purposes of his whole career were almost broken off.

The disciples, and more especially the apostles, who had been called to be with Jesus continually, to share in His schemes for saving men, and to join the society for rejuvenating the world, and to march with Him through life, to recall the erring, strengthen the weak, lift the fallen, and put new life in the lost, were cruelly disappointed, and disillusioned; for the last three years of great endeavour, holy companionship, and soul-

stirring scenes of inspiring love, seemed nothing more than a dream, or a tragic memory.

It was really a horrible time for these men. Their purposes were shattered. Their Master, nay, their very King—King of their hearts—was beaten and broken and brought down dead from the Cross of infamous reproach, and put away in a tomb. It was all so cruel. He, who had power over disease and death in others, had no power to save Himself. He had always spoken to them of life, new life, life from the dead, life for evermore; and now there was rankling in their breaking hearts the memory of His death. It was pitiable, and they suffered most acutely the pain of reaction. After having lived in a state of high pressure for three years, extreme listlessness, moral and spiritual, set in, and they could see no force or light ahead. Could they even pray? Their spiritual thoughts were so confused. If they had been able to repeat such a prayer :

“ Here where the tides all around me are bitter,
Sobbing and throbbing on sands of unrest,
Be thou the guide of me,
Close by the side of me,
Reaching me, teaching me all that is best.”

But it seems that they were in that state of

despondency when men can hardly think, much less pray; and yet subconsciously there must have been murmuring through their hearts some words of Christ's like a mother's lullaby, when her voice has long been still in death. Someone whispers—"What can I do? What is there left to do?" Memory never dies, and to Peter's mind there arose out of his subconscious suffering soul the memory of the old days of boyhood on the Lake, and there loomed across his troubled soul a scene as clear as the sunrise; the rippling waters on the peaceful shore, the misty hills in the offing, the nets and the boats and the murmuring sea; and somehow, above the brooding sorrows of His soul, came a call of the past, the memory of a scene of action; and words of resolution sprang to Peter's lips, "I go a-fishing."

This resolve and the subsequent action saved these apostles. Anything is better than pessimistic brooding over some event that may yet happen or has happened. It is not reasonable to lie down and murmur over mistakes, or sorrows, or wrongs, real or imagined, or sacrifices done in vain. There are many modern writers whose influence would lead us to a sort of nerveless attitude of soul. "Life is a medley," they say. "Men and women are mere puppets of fate. Do what you like it is all the same; you

are a barque, without a rudder, on life's ocean. There is no law, plan, purpose, nor real government of an overruling mind guiding human life." People by the million are reading books in which is written and reiterated such piffle; and can it be wondered that both America and Britain are shocked by numerous meaningless suicides. These aimless, unfortunate creatures must have lost faith in some plan of God for every human life, which, although shrouded in mystery, is wise, true, and benevolent. How can any one know what meaning and what reward life may have when he is not through it all? A chrysalis might as well demand an explanation when it is only in the dark. It cannot yet see its own future loveliness, and the glorious light of the noonday. Nothing can be gained by exaggerating the mystery of pain, or sorrow, or failure, into a bitter self-reproach, when the meaning may be quite clear on the morrow. When life is faced with mystery or trouble or suffering and the way is obscure, the faith of God teaches us to walk quietly and steadfastly in the path of duty, and the sun will yet break through the clouds.

"I go a-fishing," said Peter, when dark and lonely thoughts had gathered round his heart. The others say to him, "We will go with thee." They manifested the camaraderie of sympathy.

"I met a beggar," says a Russian poet, "and he stretched out to me his coarse ugly hand, blue with cold, and asked an alms. I felt in my pocket, and was ashamed to find I had nothing. I said, 'Brother, I have nothing,' and I gave him my hand.

"Thank you, brother," he replied, "that, too, is an alms." "We will go with thee," was like the beggar's alms, for it revealed the hand-clasp of sympathy.

No words could adequately express the feelings that were passing over the aching heart of Peter since the Crucifixion. He, the leader, had failed his Lord. How could it have happened? So full of daring and resolve was he. How could this brave heart have quailed before a little silly maid? Memory carried him back again to the shores of the Lake, when he had stood beside his boat and his nets, and the glorious young Rabbi Jesus came, with the words of faith on His lips and the light of God on His beautiful face, and said to Peter in His glowing manhood, "Follow Me." Something in that voice compelled him, and life was changed. How wonderful these years had been, like a tender idyll of love. His constant care of him, His wise rebukes, His sorrow when he sinned and His words of inspiring hope. Now that voice was stilled, the healing

hand was pierced, the feet that travelled far were torn with spikes, the heart that breathed in love was stilled for ever. It was all past and gone ; he had no longer any Master. After all this, the strain of memory and remorse and reaction set in. That is one of the most dangerous hours in a man's life. God help him if he has no sheet-anchor in such a crisis, some one to cling to, something that he can do, some hope that is steadfast. When all that is absent there is nothing left but despair. That is the last resort of a Christless heart, the disease of a faithless mind. Sound, hopeful minds with any trace of God in the life could not possibly succumb, for in the danger zone, in the firing line, and in the storm-belt they can see beyond, to the far-reaching sunlight.

It was impossible for any one to be three years in close companionship with Jesus and still remain in ignorance of the truth that " God's in His Heaven." Peter proved this. Silent despair did not take possession of his heart because God was in the plan, and life had something still to do and so he said, " I go a-fishing." It was a splendid resolution. He may have thought himself a failure in following Jesus fully, but there was one thing he could do well ; he could fish ; and he had fished with great success for many a

day. God was with him often, toiling and rowing on the Sea of Galilee, before ever he met Jesus Christ. The waves spoke to him of God; the hills pointed to Him, the storms called him upward. Jesus never would have said, "Follow Me" to Peter, had he not had thoughts of God long before that day. He and the others were among the faithful in the Jewish religion—a faith of fellowship with God. What then did Christ do for Peter? He intensified his faith and made God real to him. That is really the meaning of conversion. Jesus makes God real to us, intensifies our faith in Him and reveals the beauty of service. And every man or woman is converted to God who trusts Him fully and conforms his life to the path of duty.

The service of Peter on the fishing boat where God, in days before, had filled his thoughts appealed to him once more. Perhaps in honest toil he would find again the love that he had lost; perhaps at the old trade God would have pity and reveal Himself afresh, and the memory of Jesus would again fill his soul with peace.

The foundations of life were really shaken at Peter's feet after the crucifixion and the burial. The same kind of experience has come to many truly Christian men and women during these last few years. The foundations of truth and right

and purity and religion seemed tottering for a fall. Yet somehow there was faith in their hearts that God's sway on earth was not destroyed, and His programme of life for mankind was not blotted out. Their faith was made firmer by work. "I go a-fishing." The path of duty calls us always, and it is the road to safety. Men have realised that war and even revolution have not wrecked the Christian religion. The foundations are more firmly fixed than ever. Christianity is life intensified and lifted into the fellowship of God. It is more intense these days than ever. Jesus is constantly breaking in on man's life. He is breaking into the life of every young man, as He did of old to Peter, and saying, "Follow Me." No one, under any circumstances, can forget for ever that call. When that call is heeded, He comes straight into one's life.

Peter and his comrades thought that they were at the dead end. Why, they were just at the beginning. They could never be the same again and they soon knew it. The voices of love and goodness that had spoken to them could never be silenced. Do you think for a moment that a mother who has seen her child passing through the Valley of the Shadow and has bidden the last farewell, can ever be the same? No! it has exalted her, raised her towards heaven. So did

these men take their new experiences into their old calling.

That is the world's great need to-day—not a new religion, a new faith, a new Christ, but rather that hearts touched and renewed by the spirit of Christ, should go into the business and pleasures of life, inspiring others with their new experience and hope. Joan of Arc died rather than deny that experience. No one who has ever felt the touch of the Son of God on his heart can be content with the old life and the old experiences. Peter might fish, but the call of Christ would ring in his ears till eternity. And no one who has ever known the reality of Christ's presence can ever let the dark days of sorrow or wounds or pain or disappointment banish Him from his daily life. The darkness of doubt passed over Peter's heart and the darkness of night passed over Peter's boat, but when the morning broke Jesus stood beside him on the shore.

Amid all life's mystery and darkness, and disease, and death, the experience of Peter can be ours. The morning will break and Christ will stand beside us on the shore.

THE CANT OF A KING

*"The sword devoureth one
as well as another."*

(2 SAM. xi. 25.)

VI

THE CANT OF A KING

THIS is one of the most glaring cases in Scripture of the duality of natures in a man of sterling character. It is a humiliating case of the Jekyll-Hyde spirit. And it is remarkable that R. L. Stevenson, who created in literature Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, manifests in his "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes," a trait of extreme cruelty in his treatment of the diminutive donkey, "Modestine," his little patient beast of burden on his travels. It is surely a peculiar kink in human nature that a man who could write the "Prayers in Samoa," and sit up for nights watching a dying child, could be so heartless as to draw the blood, by his brutality to a dumb animal.

The Scriptural instance before us is a most glaring case, not merely of brutality but of pitiable cant. The case referred to in David's words is too well known. Uriah, the Hittite—a true and generous man—stood in the way of the king's most brutish and sensual passions.

He must be got out of his path, and if there was no other way it had to be by death. David did not kill him, oh, no! A big man, a king, can keep in the background, and, in secret, write to his general, Joab, to put Uriah in the forefront of the battle, where it was fiercest. There is not much chance for a soldier in the front line when a battle is raging, and poor trustful Uriah paid the penalty for his wife's treachery and his king's disgraceful sin. The messenger came to report to him the progress of the battle, and the disaster that had befallen his servants, and, said he, "Uriah, thy servant the Hittite, is dead." "Ah, well," said this canting king, "the sword devoureth one as well as another." It was merely a subterfuge for the truth: the reservation in his own heart of a shocking motive to get Uriah killed, where the fortunes of war, the devouring sword, are excused for the sin of his guilty soul.

It is a glaring example of a good man in many ways blinding himself by the fascination of forbidden passions, and rolling the blame on accident or nature or extraneous cause. It was just the sword, he said, that slew Uriah, and what had he to do with the risks of war! It was a *suppressio veri*, and his better self told him so.

No man can cover for ever in his own soul the

sins which the promptings of the physical would excuse. There comes a time when the light of an awakened conscience, in the shape of a Nathan's living words, breaks in upon the soul, and sweeps away all subterfuge and leaves him alone with his God, and the ghost of Uriah and the conviction of his soul which cried, "I have sinned. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation."

It is a very easy matter to attack things that do not touch us, affairs thought to be outside our lives. The king was exceedingly indignant at the recital by Nathan of the stealing of the one ewe lamb. His soul blazed in indignation. He was like many a woman who, while weeping over a vivid act of cruelty to a child in a novel is, in actual life, cruel to her own child. Sentiment is not true religion and never was. It is quite easy to denounce, at the corners of streets, strange cults in America that may be accused by press notices of doing remarkable things; attack the sins of city merchants and the idiosyncrasies of the London smart set, or any such follies, but it is extremely hard to attack the faults of harshness, untruth, selfishness, gluttony, and pride roaming over some corner in our own little house. Prejudice against other people's faults may be a fine sentiment; true religion should carry it

one step further, and crush the reptile in our own hearts. It is far too easy for men to reserve for domestic purposes the sins they crucify in the public or private lives of others.

Goethe once said, "There are many echoes but few voices." The echoes keep reverberating, "The sword devoureth one as well as another"; the voices of conscience cry, "I have sinned."

The excuses of very good people are often as trivial as they are untrue. No one would deny that the sword was capable of killing any man, but the truth was, Uriah should not have been in front of the sword, and would not have been had David not put him there. It was a canting excuse and utterly untrue to fact. There are Scriptural and other instances of this, if we had space to mention them. Aaron, the elder brother of Moses, on one occasion was left alone at the foot of the mount with the Israelites. Moses stayed long talking to God on the mount. Aaron grew impatient, so did the people, and thought he would never come back. The half-emancipated people of the captivity cried for a god, and brought their bits of jewellery and earrings of gold to Aaron, the man whom God and His servant Moses trusted to keep the people steady—who had stood brave in the magnificent dignity of faith when his two sons lay dead, and who,

in the seething Korahitic rebellion, prayed calmly that the plague might cease.

And yet this same man, in a crisis, for a reason not clear, perhaps it was weakness or cowardice or fear or desire, stifled conscience, yielded to the people for a hand-made god, and even abetted them in their sin. And Moses, coming down from the mount, and being horrified and indignant, asked the meaning of the golden calf that they were worshipping, said to him, "What did this people unto thee that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron answered, "The people were set on mischief; they asked for gods to go before them, and they brought their golden trinkets, and I cast them into the fire, and there came out this calf." What a trivial, canting, insidious excuse! What a perversion of facts, to cover up his own debauch of materialism, his disregard of God's law, his distorted faith! It was the Mr Hyde part of Aaron's nature that said, "I cast them into the fire, and there came out this calf." Hyde in actual life is constantly making excuses for sin and crime. In Stevenson's creation, the experimenting with life was the reason for the Hyde perversions and murders.

In our own times the same experiments with life go on. *Experientia docet* is quite a good

maxim, and the more experiments we make in the knowledge of life the better. Ignorance may be bliss, but it takes wisdom to lead and guide great causes. Therefore get wisdom by thinking, by experimenting, by learning. There are thousands of ways to be wise ; there is but one way to be both wise and good, and that method is by doing the right. There are madcaps, Hotspurs, who will do anything good or bad, to get new sensations, to have new gods, to realise new freedom, to purchase new loves, and buy new licences. No Uriahs will stand in their way ! No Moses shall interfere ! No god must prevent them. They will use the sword, melt the family trinkets, and revile God and trample on the right, for a hideous image, unbridled passion, or reckless folly. And when Moses comes down from the mount with the law of God in his hands and the fire of God in his soul, a shuffling, cowardly excuse is given, " I put their gold into the fire, and there came out this calf." " The sword devoureth one as well as another."

We must, in dealing with religious teaching, endeavour to get in touch with Christian facts. One truth clearly stated in the New Testament is the duality of human nature. Paul says, " When I would do good, evil is present with me. What I would that do I not ; but what I hate

that I do." There is no other explanation for the hideous action of so good a man as David the Psalmist. It is a fact of life that we must observe in applying the Christian truths to the lives of men. There are saints who have stooped to degrading sins, and sinners who have risen to wonderful holiness. George Douglas Brown wrote "The House with the Green Shutters" several years ago. There is not one redeeming feature in any character in the book. Not a ray of goodness shines through the green shutters. That is not true to life. But there was a reason for Brown's book. He meant it to be a recoil from the unnatural sentimentality of the "Kail Yard" school of Ian Maclaren and others who depicted Scottish character in mawkish flawless types that every Scot knows to be thoroughly unreal and unlike true life in Scotland.

The language of Paul portrays the experience of human longings and Christian desires. There is no other explanation. Nothing else could solve the problems of the unspeakable sins of otherwise good men and women. It all comes back to the teaching of the New Testament, that men of Christian faith must guard themselves strenuously against the cant that David manifested and the deceitfulness that Aaron showed. We have two natures, the good and the bad—

every child of Adam and Eve. But the man who trusts his God and follows the right is promised that the good shall prevail. Light will shine into his soul in the dark days when sensual desires are strongest, and faith can lean on God when human wills are weakest. The life of subterfuge; the allegiance of Dr Jekyll to God and Mr Hyde to Mammon; the heart fixed on Christ and the bodily eye fixed on the obscene rites of a mechanical calf sucking the best from one's life; these are certain to fail and must plunge the soul into horror and despair. The sins that would destroy us should be resolutely driven from the life. It can be done by God's grace, and ought to be done, otherwise a horror-stricken bitter cry like David's will rise, "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God."

When we gather around that beautiful altar of faithfulness to God, and listen to the voices that speak of love and duty and courage, the lower things of life—the false and foul and treacherous—will fade gradually from our vision, and we will see clearly the things that matter—the sacred thoughts of the soul that build character and fit us for life in that city whose builder and maker is God.

THE IRON GATE

"When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out."

(ACTS xii. 10.)

VII

THE IRON GATE

THERE are just a few words necessary in explanation of the context.

The great apostle Peter, who led the fight of faith for Christ and true liberty, had been delivered by King Herod to four quaternions of soldiers, and cast into prison to be cruelly martyred after Easter Day.

Special care was taken that he should not escape. Herod saw to that, for between him and the city were placed the first, and then the second ward, and after that the iron gate. How could mortal man face and vanquish these? So he made the best of things in prison, and whatever else he did he certainly prayed and yearned, and being tired out, fell asleep, but in the confidence that God would keep him, even in a prison cell. And he was quite right in that, for while sleeping a Voice spoke to him and bade him arise and gird himself. This he did, and

followed the angel messenger, who led him on, and they passed the first and second ward, and then came to the iron gate leading to the city, and it opened and they went out. That is the context, and what is the meaning of the iron gate? It was the final and most difficult hindrance between him and freedom. He had to face it and pass through it, and then—liberty. On life's highway, on fields of adventure, we must sooner or later meet difficulties, hindrances, and antagonisms, and what are these but the Iron Gate? I do not think many, even the youngest, can get far through life without meeting some great difficulty. They must face it and try to force it open, and many do, and pass through it to victory.

This Iron Gate may take certain forms. Every man must meet, and each of us must face it in the

Form of Temptation.

There are two meanings in temptation. The primary meaning is trial, sorrow, discipline, anything by which we are made to suffer. Some of these are sent by a wise Providence. St James had this meaning in his mind when he wrote, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." The other and commoner meaning is, solicitation towards evil, a leaning downwards to

lower things. In this sense God tempts no one. He calls men upward, and when they choose the lower in the test and in the crisis, this is sin.

It is impossible to avoid these tests, because solicitations to wrong-doing come from within a man's heart as well as from without. Monks and nuns fly from the world to escape it, but they would have to break free from their own hearts to get away from the iron gate. And a foe within is worse than a foe without. A spy in the camp like the traitor sergeant at the Ypres Front in 1917 was a more dangerous enemy than the best German division. The foe within is unsuspected, and can open the gate to the enemy. The heart of a man may have the traitor within, and if he is not expelled, the weak defences he causes in a crisis may mean moral collapse. When one seeks the higher and the purer in the crisis, then St James's words are true of him, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

The very best and noblest living men and women have to face the antagonistic iron gate, and they are surprised that it is so strong and persistent. Some who try to live cleanly and act honourably are humiliated because of this fight against the evil desires of the flesh and the

world and the devil ; but the finest natures and the noblest characters have often to battle most. This is not a fault but a virtue, for secret conflicts, bravely met, put the key in the iron gate and it opens to freedom and victory.

Young soldiers, fresh from a secluded training, and boys in public works at home have constantly to listen to evil suggestions from vicious men whose aim is to pervert and destroy. During hours like these, the battle in the heart of the young and the brave and the strong is often the fiercest. Men of that evil type are like the Upas tree which grows in Java. A Dutch surgeon tells a story about the emanations of this tree. Birds breathing them fall dead, and animals die because the tree breathes out virulent poison. Every clean life should shun this vicious type as it would the Upas tree. A moral lapse often means blighted youth and shipwrecked manhood floating like a derelict on life's beautiful ocean.

So, then, both kinds of temptation when seen aright call men upward. They give a splendid opportunity to force the iron gate by courage and faith. When St Peter came to it, it was opened by the prayer of the Church and the Key of faith, and God led him out to victory.

Again, every one of us must face our Iron Gate, when it takes the

Form of Failure.

I suppose we must admit that all of us have failed sometime either morally or spiritually. Failure is deficiency or a going under. How soldiers feared it and hated it. It was not fear of death but of being deficient in the crisis, and of showing the white feather when the command should come to go forward. The very same fear breathes through the pulses of the inner life in our daily calling. We must face our iron gate, and yet how greatly the fear of failure tortures mankind. James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine, dreaded failure, though he stuck to his drudgery through poverty and sickness, and finally he overcame. And every Scot knows, or ought to know, how Robert Bruce came up against failure and depression as he lay brooding over six disasters. The spider failed six times to fix its line to a beam, and succeeded in the seventh, and Bruce, looking on, took courage and went out, and tried again and triumphed.

The same forces that go towards success in the material often operate in the spiritual world. Why do some men fail in worldly matters? They fail for lack of courage or perseverance, or strength of will. Why do so many fail in the spiritual life? For lack of moral courage and

spiritual perseverance. Many a brilliant Christian beginning has ended in collapse because of moral cowardice. And yet while all that is true, that many have success because of enduring energy and worth, and others have failed for want of these, there are some who have gone under morally, and yet appear to have done their best. These are the people who look pathetically at the iron gate and despair of ever opening it. They often whisper to their own hearts :

“ I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes, and all our heartaches,
And all of our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped, like a shabby old coat at the door,
And never put on again.”

Not a few who failed in the lowest meaning utter that same heart's cry. And after the lapse, and the sin, and the failure, then the sickness of remorse. For such men, is there a land of Beginning Again? Can they find some key that will open the iron gate? One sad day, the cruellest in Peter's life, he failed in the Hall of Judgment, sank in self-respect and denied his Master because of craven cowardice ; nevertheless, in that terrible hour of disaster and defeat, Jesus, the perfect Man, looked into his eyes and saw his broken purposes and pitied and forgave. In spite of incompre-

hensible weakness and moral asthenia the Hand of Christ opened to penitent Peter the gate of iron into spiritual freedom and magnificent apostolic success.

No one can escape the Iron Gate, for we must all face it in the

Form of Death.

Some have to face this gate in youth, before the toil and strife and tumult of life have marked the brow and blanched the cheek and whitened the hair, and bravely do they enter through the portals. Others have to face it in the bloom of manhood and womanhood when life is full of dream and love and achievement—when vision is ablaze, and the future is sunlit by some wizard's wand leading ever, in thought, to scenes of song and high resolve and bold adventure and instinctive courage. They have to meet it as multitudes have done in time of war and scourge in their glorious prime, but still with hearts unsullied they keep repeating:

“ Oh, Lord, that I could waste my life for others,
With no ends of my own !
That I could pour myself into my brothers
And live for them alone.”

Others have to face it unwilling and unprepared. They are dragged up to it as men are

hustled to the gaol and the scaffold, with hate and lust and loathsome thoughts rankling in heart and mind. Under such circumstances the iron gate strikes terror to the soul because faith and hope and love are absent.

While others meet it when the years are full, and the soul is ready and the lips are whispering, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, and have finished my course and have kept the faith;" and the ears are waiting for the last reveille calling through the gate into the City of God. We must all meet this last iron gate sometime, somewhere. "Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death."

But does it matter when or where we have to meet it, if we have done our bit, and have borne our share, and have played the game, and have committed to God the life that once He gave us?

What does it matter how many years are gone, and suns have shone and stars have set, and we may have missed them, even though our purposes on earth are broken off, our victories unaccomplished and our gallant deeds are left undone if it is God's time—the best time—to lead us through the Gate to the City? There are other lands afar and golden gates in that "City which hath foundation whose builder and maker

is God." There are greater things than we have dreamt of beyond the bourne of earth and time. If we therefore give our lives to Him who can save to the uttermost we need never fear the iron gate of Death.

It will be remembered by those who have read "The Pilgrim's Progress," that Christian was in a bad way, for he had been led by Giant Despair into Doubting Castle, where he was ill-used and frightened and he could not get out. But his friend Hopeful reminded him that he had a Key: then he used the Key and opened the gate and got his freedom. The antidote to all fear is the Key—the Key of faith. It will open every iron gate and will let men through without peril or panic or pain. The Key of faith opened the iron gate to Peter, and he went out strengthened, to work for Christ, and to confirm the faith of the fearful, and to comfort the men and women who had never ceased to pray for him in his lonely prison cell.

THE SILENCE OF ARABIA

*"I went into Arabia, and
returned again unto Damascus."*
(GAL. i. 17.)

VIII

THE SILENCE OF ARABIA

IN life's momentous days, the heart at last stands still, and the throbbing brain seeks silence and rest. In the lives of many there come, fortunately, few such days; but when they come, there is a desire to scrutinise and analyse one's inner life, and retreat into the silences or run away to some peaceful Arabia where one can withdraw and ruminate and resolve, and perhaps return. In the crisis it seems to most a dreadful collapse, but it is often, indeed, the way of deliverance. After the overwhelming experience and revelation through the penetrating Christ-spirit on the road to Damascus, there were days when Saul was practically speechless and sightless and an immense calm took the place of the raging storm in his soul. It was like an earthquake, and everything had to be readjusted in the light of it.

The city of Damascus, with its rivalries and sectarianism and jealous bickerings, was not the place for quiet soul-analysis and self-inquisitive-

ness. He must get into some peaceful background away from the madding crowd and the strife of tongues. That was the reason of his retreat to Arabia. He saw clearly that his whole life would have to be reconstructed in the light of the Cross. He must gather up the facts and unravel the strange views and arguments that were weaving themselves around his inmost heart.

There are so many things one can never get unless by going to Arabia. The "Stones of Venice" could never have been written had Ruskin not basked in tremendous loneliness in beautiful Chamonix and near the snow-crowned Alps.

Shallow natures do not feel the need of going to Arabia because they never think, and consequently never do anything worth while. It is the men and women who feel deeply and think amid the silences, who return to toil and do the deeds that count. Raymond Lull, proud chieftain at the palace of Majorca, accepted the faith of Christ, and withdrew to one of his country houses and studied for eight or nine years to prepare for mission work. That was his Arabia. He emerged to do great missionary deeds for the King of kings.

We know very little of what Paul did in Arabia. We can only surmise how he felt and yearned

and prayed, that his after life might prove worthy of that Voice that called to him and drew his soul to the Cross. The storms of hatred must be calmed, the passion of bigotry must be curbed, the love of fame must be checked in the wilderness, and over and over again his turbulent spirit had to repeat the old question, asked with the glare of light in his eyes near Damascus, " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? " And in these days of disappointment and apparent defeat, new experiences took possession of his heart, and he learned to know God, and find the Christ he had missed. He learned in its fullness the new experience of sins forgiven, peace restored, and hope bestowed. He found in Arabia a close, personal, intimate knowledge of his Lord.

" Dim tracts of time divide
Those golden days from me,
Thy voice comes strange o'er years of change ;
How can I follow Thee ? "

That was the question he had to decide in the silences of Arabia.

You may be quite sure that during these days in the illimitable spaces of these great plains and sunlit mountains, the petty questions of self-love, and the limited view of Israel's God, were transformed into a belief that was adequate and

worthy of the breadth and depth of the love that claimed him. There were gathering round his soul strange cadences of love, and peace, and mercy, and forgiveness. The psychology of the moment was, how he could ever express it in words to win the souls of thousands, or sing the note to charm the hearts of men. A new outlook spread across his horizon. The fields were white already to the harvest—touched with golden ripeness in the sunshine of Christ's love. The sadness of regret for wasted years mingled with the glorious joy of living the after years in harmony with the will of God. His soul was being cultivated in the desert with the mystic love of a life that would never end. He went to the depths to anchor his soul and he found pearls of priceless worth. It was the personality of Jesus that anchored him. Like Mark Rutherford in his essay on "Principles," so might Paul have said of his experience in Arabia, "I only speak my own experience. I am not talking theology or philosophy. I know what I am saying, and can point out the times and places when I should have fallen if I had been able to rely for guidance upon nothing better than a commandment or deduction. But the pure, calm, heroic figure of Jesus confronted me, and I succeeded. I had no doubt as to what He would have done, and

through Him I did not doubt what I ought to do."

Very few men and women can accomplish great good in the world without spending some time like Paul, in retreat, in Arabia.

Gipsy Smith has told his hearers that, after he was led to Christ by a praying father, he found his Arabia among the Romany hills and valleys and woods of old England, where the birds and the flowers, the trees and the winds, spoke to him of God. For years he lingered, reading and praying and listening to God whispering messages to his soul, and then the call, clamorous and definite, came to him to tell in his own simple way, that the Christ of the Churches, the Founder of the Christian religion, the Jesus who died at Calvary and spoke to him in the silences, can redeem and save lost and broken human earthenware. Like Moses of old, he saw God face to face and then went out and spoke to men. Hearts are hungry and souls athirst for God everywhere, and that is why true evangelists like Gipsy Smith and ministers in every land can speak with hearts aglow with love divine to the longings of childhood, to the vision of right in manhood and womanhood, and to the unsatisfied aspirations of lonely years, with irresistible power to calm the distressed and draw weary hearts to the Cross.

If ministers have the power to send souls to Arabia, they are doing work that millionaires cannot pay for, and priceless gold could never buy.

When Tennyson was dying he was asked if he wanted anything. "Yes," he answered, "a new vision of God."

The materialist can never see that vision, because it is the spiritual only who can have a real vision of God. The world had lost that vision and many of the nations must have lost it too, else the Great War—a crime which was bound to leave an aftermath of sin and death and corruption—could never have been permitted by nations professing the name of Christ.

The nations all need to get a new vision of God and speak to Him in the quietness of Arabia, if they are to move forward to a cleaner and holier world—that world that is the Kingdom of Christ.

The published history of the world is often a history of noise and battle, and clashing armour, and shouting of conquerors, of kings and generals, dukes and knights, stormy oratory and militant ecclesiastical warfare. It is so on the surface, but in reality there is another history unwritten running all through the tumultuous life of human kind—a history not of kings and soldiers and fighters, but of nameless mothers, sisters of

nursing, devoted sons, heroic fathers, and a host of unknown men and women who, when the noise of the world was greatest, and the trouble at their own heart was fiercest, withdrew to the silence of Arabia. And what was their desert of stillness, in which they gained courage, faced God in prayer, and grew a heroism fit to meet the world again, with its noise, its dilemmas, its sins, and its cares? To many it was the quiet room, the sleepless hours, the darkened home, the house of prayer, and like Paul of old, they have gone back strong and able to bear life's over-pressure in the sublime consciousness of eternal realities.

Sometimes the folly of a moment drives man into the desert. The folly of hatred to the Church of Christ drove Paul there. Sometimes even in an instant a deed is done, a foolish, irremediable choice is made, and a bolt flashes from the blue.

“ And there cometh a mist, and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.”

But it is not merely folly, but unmerited failure and tragic bereavement that bring the mist and weeping rain, driving men to the silences of the desert. It is not for nothing that men go there; there come cleansing resignation and comfort. We would never have had “ In Memoriam,” a

poem that brought comfort to countless lives, had Tennyson not lost his friend, Arthur Hallam ; and I question whether that cameo in Paul's letter to the Corinthians could ever have been penned had he not yearned and repented and abolished hatred from his heart in Arabia's solitude, whispering, " Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not. . . . And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity."

All the glory and greatness of that splendid life of Paul was first of all lit by the light of the Christ, and his to-morrows were all influenced by the conception of these far-away yesterdays in Arabia, where he had learned of Christ and had his wounded spirit soothed by the healing touch of the Friend of sinners.

From his retreat in Arabia he returned to win the world to the Cross. He returned without fear of sin or wrong or toil or death and never did he flinch. How was this ? Because he formed an abiding friendship with God in the desert ; and in the battles of the world God never left him, for the friendship of God is eternal—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

THE MOTIVE OF MORAL
HEROISM

*"The people that do know
their God shall be strong, and
do exploits."*

(DAN. xi. 32.)

IX

THE MOTIVE OF MORAL HEROISM

THE late Professor Marcus Dods, when he was an old man, said, "I do not envy those who have to fight the battle of Christianity in the twentieth century." Then, pausing a little, he added, "Yes, perhaps I do, but it will be a stiff fight." That grand old thinker was right, and yet he had not foreseen the havoc that the fiends of war have made on religious feelings and the faith of the Christian Church. One cannot doubt that many, during the greater part of the last decade, were drawn by the general drift almost unconsciously away from confidence in God, and from the need of a religious faith. Sometimes a blind stoicism and the semi-conscious thought that life was dominated by scientific forces and human beings were the play of these took their place.

In the maddening maze of things, even Christians came to the haunting surmise that Christianity is like a kind of lined glove, quite pleasant to put on, but not indispensable—a good thing that life could do without. The attitude of so

many is just like that, and the second thoughts of Marcus Dods of the stiffness of the fight against that indifferent neutrality while true are gloriously stimulating, because the men and women in this century who have come through the past few years of purgatory, cleansed by the real knowledge of God, are certain that the faith of Jesus Christ is no fur-lined glove luxury, but a necessity for the maintenance of life at its best. The great days in the life of men and nations are those on which the truth is realised that religion, especially that of the Christ, is necessary to unravel life's mysteries, disclose its hidden meaning, and brighten its winding pathways to the goal.

It was related recently in a London church by one who was a student at the time of the incident, that the late Dr A. B. Bruce of Glasgow was lecturing in Mansfield College Chapel, Oxford, on the Person and Work of Christ to hearers drawn from different denominations. There were Methodists and Presbyterians also who, of all people, are least accustomed to ejaculatory expressions in church. And when Dr Bruce uttered this sentence, "If God be like Jesus, the world has reason to be glad," there arose from every part of the chapel the word "Amen." It is those who have an experimental knowledge of God through

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the person and faith of Jesus in time of stress and battle who are really strong and do exploits.

If ever strength was manifested in a life, it was in that of Daniel, who wrote these words of the text. He faced the fiery furnace and defied the lion's roar, rather than deny the God he knew and loved and worshipped. Had Daniel not known God he would never have had that heroic courage which has made him a synonym of strength to every youth to-day. This knowledge of the Old Testament hero is a magnificent source of power to all who possess it.

Many people think that we of this age are faced with difficulties of faith greater than those which believers in Jesus Christ have ever met before. That, one cannot be sure of. We do know that every generation has its difficulties and every age produces men and women to solve them. We are not without men and women of faith in this age in Church and State who are strong in the knowledge of God and have faith and vision and are very jealous for the Lord of Hosts. The knowledge of God which the prophet Daniel had is enhanced infinitely to us by His Son Jesus Christ. That exquisite intercessory prayer of His, "That they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent," draws us into touch with the

Divine. This knowledge is a motive and carries with it characteristics which combine to equip those who possess them to do deeds of daring and work the works of God. The people who know their God shall be

Strong in Purpose.

No man who has named himself a Christian can wage for any length a holy warfare except one whose heart is fixed in deliberate purpose to live rightly, and there will be no exploits by him or her whose will is "feckless." In Greek mythology the beautiful story of Hercules and the lion of Nemea is told. Hercules had the outstanding virtue that the Greeks called *σωφροσύνη*, sober-mindedness. This virtue was typified in Hercules who exhibits a life strong in self-control, representing toiling, dauntless, victorious manhood.

The man who slew a lion in these far-off Grecian days was proclaimed a hero. Hercules killed the fiercest and strongest and most hideous lion in the forest. This lion was a monster and had to be fought in the darkness, without weapons, and the only way to overcome him was by clutching his throat till he was choked. Hercules met and conquered this dreadful lion of Nemea, and ever after wore the shaggy hide as a mantle.

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There is a Nemean lion in every life, temptation to impurity, or dishonesty, or fear, or untruthfulness. If we are not firm of purpose, and clutch it by the throat, choke off its gathering breath, it will crunch with its poisonous fangs our heart and life to powder. If we have strength of purpose to face and defy it, its power will fall on us as the shaggy lion's fell on the shoulders of Hercules.

Purposeless individuals are like the creatures who simper out of evil hearts the question of the "Lotus Eaters," "What pleasure can we have to war with evil?" Those who know God glory in that war. It gives them strength of purpose to leave their infallible mark in the records of the world. The contrast of the old roué with shattered purposes is Byronic in its bitterness :

" Life has lost its zest, Sorrow is my guest,
O the lees are bitter,
Love once filled the boale, but I drank it dry,
O the lees are bitter."

The people that do know this God shall be

Strong in Deed.

Purpose might be negative only. It might simply refrain from committing acts of dishonour or disgrace. It might say, "I shall not

commit this great wickedness," and just stop there. To keep our garments unspotted from the world is excellent, but it is not all the vision contains. It is only like the violet rays of the spectrum. It is the shadowed part of the faith of Jesus. The outstanding part is magnificent endeavour. To work the works of God was and still is the call of the Christ. "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They went everywhere, these great, rugged, strong fishers of Galilee, and drew every type of man to the Cross.

They saw Jesus in the lonely valleys of Jordan, where He spoke to them of love and purity and resolve. They listened to His prayers on the Mount of Olives, and saw His beautiful face wreathed in a cloud of agony in Gethsemane, and their hearts were full of the unshed tears of yearning. They resolved then that they would not forsake Him. That was the negative part they played. Then He died and rose again from the tomb and called them to His love again and said not, "Follow Me," but, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." That was positive action, and who will venture to assert that these men who knew Him were not strong and did exploits?

There are two worlds—the world of thought

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and the world of action. The faith of Christ, if it be real, touches both these worlds. It cleanses the thought and it leads to progressive action, and the work our Lord inspires in the heart is always worth doing. He never fails to make effort worth while. He makes the reach always higher than the grasp, and shows us always higher ladders to scale.

“ All we have willed or hoped, or dreamed of good,
shall exist.”

The faithful always see “ That light is shining
still on life’s far side.” They who know their
God shall be

Strong in Faith.

The faith of Jesus is the motive of action, it is the live wire of Christianity. It points to fields white already to harvest, and is the vital impetus that makes us garner in. It is simple and beautiful and no one need stumble at its doctrine.

“ I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven
and earth,
And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord.”

This faith has kept millions strong in life and faithful in the hour of death.

In the view of the apostles and the early disciples, religion was an absolute necessity to mankind. There was to be broadcast everywhere Christ's invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We must never draw our little lines too short, but let them reach every wanderer and draw the Christless in. That was Christ's command because He knew that even the vilest man could not get rid of God. There is flaming in his soul a spark which is part of God and cannot and will not be put out. He may live apparently without God, profess atheism, and repudiate the Christian faith. He may do infinitely worse, and yet that man has not got rid of God. The eternal love is feeding him and yearning over him, and still he does not know that God is in his life.

Those who have read "Daddy Long Legs" will remember that Jerusha Abbott was helped by an unknown friend. Year by year, till she reaches girlhood and womanhood, favours come from him and she does not know him. One day she sees him but does not recognise him. Imagination pictured him so different and so she does not recognise him. The story does not end there. Wouldn't it be dreadful to be served by a friend all one's life and not recognise and thank

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him? Yet that is what so many are doing with the unseen God. They do not recognise Him, although He has loved them always. That is the awful tragedy of the man who does not know Him.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE
BREEZES**

*"He stayeth His rough wind
in the day of the east wind."*

(ISA. xxvii. 8.)

X

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BREEZES

ALL through the writings of the Prophets there are traces of imagery, gems of poetic thought, and the eloquence of inspiration. This is specially seen when some great calamity is threatening the nation, or intense sorrow has touched the people's lives. When the hand of God touches the heart strings, it is quite natural that glowing words and music immortal should be heard. A poet's imagery is in the words of the text, as well as the note of perfect faith, and we should therefore try to interpret it by the heart of faith and bring its meaning down to the common levels of life.

In one of Dickens's famous books, Mr Jarndyce, the hero and the owner of "Bleak House," exclaims or whispers, "The wind's in the East," when things are unpleasant, ugly, or unsatisfactory. The east wind is proverbial for coldness. It brings with it very often pains, neuritis, disease, and death. The majority of people dislike and fear the winds from the east. It is

just as well, however, to face the fact that east winds will blow at times all through life as well as those of south and west. Life is not all an affair of sunny days and soft southern breezes. It is a great pity when such a view takes root in any youth's or girl's life, because it is untrue, and truth should always prevail. When east winds blow, as blow they must in time, those who have had a false upbringing will become a prey to the enemies of discouragement and fear and perhaps failure. It is quite the same in the spiritual life. We can't get to heaven by constantly reposing on beds of ease. Life is made up of field, market, counting-house, railway journeys, and rough and steep foot-marchings. It is not all shelter and food and sunshine in a world of action. The life of faith must encounter also cold cruel days of biting easterly blasts. It cannot be always Church and hymn singing and blest communion days. No, but too many of us live in the belief that the spiritual life begins and ends in these. It goes far beyond; and temptation and distrust and suspicions and wicked allurements penetrate like the east wind into life, and these must be met with the fortifying power of the uplifting influence of Christ and His Church, remembering His words that He will stay His rough wind in the days when the east wind blows.

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It is, of course, very easy to sing "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world," when the "lark's on the wing and the morning's dew pearled," but the way of life is not always like that. The lark is oftener on the cold ground than on the wing, and the mornings are oftener damp with the cold drizzling rain ; and yet these are the days when we must learn to sing and know that "God's in His Heaven."

"We bleed and hate and suffer and are blind
Uncomprehending ; yet if one will mind
That light is shining still on life's far side."

The heart is cold indeed that cannot sing when the lark's on the wing.

"In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are brightning,
Thou dost float and run ;
Like an embodied joy whose race is just begun."

It speaks to us of expansive freedom and points us to the skies, above all the fret and stir and strife of the world, where the air is clear and pure, and where its voice in the unseen distances calls our hearts to the threshold of God's Throne. In days like these we reach the heights of spiritual blessedness, and we are sure that God reigns.

The east winds may blow, but they only scatter the clouds of unbelief and the mists of sorrow and show us the face of the Father.

Notice then that the God of Nature and Grace is not limited to any art of wind or weather. He is not excluded from the east and He lets His sun shine on the west.

There are not a few who are utterly blind to the workings of God and even of His existence until some dark calamity like war, disaster, or earthquake comes, or a sweeping pestilential plague carries men off by the hundred. They limit Him to a visible working of horrors. This is no special sign of God's presence ; it is rather proof of the superstitious ignorance of their own attitude to belief in God. They see His working in the storm and tempest and wild swept hills of death and disaster, but they do not associate Him with the calm and strength and joy of manhood and womanhood and all its glad surroundings. They will not let Him enter their lives when the sweet soft south is glad with sunshine. They shut Him out, when marriage bells are ringing and exclude Him from the joy of the harvest home. They will not listen during these days to the peaceful penetration of the Almighty's sway over life.

There are some also who ignore God altogether

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in the humdrum level stretches of life with its monotonous routine and common duties. The sultry south has nothing of God in it for them. Prayer is never thought of in the "Land of the Lotus Eaters." They have no use for prayer to the Over Heart whilst amidst dust and heat and monotonous valleys and plains. They have never learned that these are the very days for the practice of the presence of God in their lives, that these are the days when spiritual development should be greatest. They might see the beauty of God in these experiences, as a child can see the love of God in the little common daisy, looking up in gratitude to its Creator.

The author of "De Profundis" pathetically tells us that his fall was due to the fact that he always chose the sunny side of the street and made the pursuit of pleasure a fine art. He was blind to, or he shut out everything but the south winds and the sunshine of life. Pleasure and sunshine are certainly part of the make-up of life, but it is not limited to these, nor is God to be excluded from the pleasures and duties and common days of life.

When Charles Darwin was a young man he read poetry, and especially Shakespeare, up to the age of thirty, and found great pleasure in it. He gave it up then for scientific pursuits alone,

and he made great discoveries, no doubt. Then he took to reading Shakespeare again after many years, and found its pleasure gone. "If," he says, "I had my life to live again, I would have made it a rule to read some poetry or listen to some music at least once every week."

It is a petty policy for a man to exclude worship and prayer and good works during the common humdrum days, or the pressing duties of business. If we do, there is the danger that spiritual sense may die. Notice again that God sends neither south nor east winds simply for our pleasures, but rather for our character. I do not read these words of Isaiah merely in the light of compensation. There is much more than that in it. I do not think any man should either trust in God or work for Him merely for reward or compensation. It is a contemptible motive, and such as a true man spurns. He trusts God because it is right, and works for Him because it is the best way of making the most of the life God has given him. The "Uriah Heeps" of Christianity are particularly despicable. But there is nothing more certain in life than that if we face the east wind, and stand up to it like Christ our Leader and Hero, we will not have to face it any longer than is necessary. He will send the south in time and in the right time, and stay the biting east.

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Every one who has lived the life of faith in God knows this to be true. It is not the east wind in the face that will make so much difference—it is the effect of the rough winds on our character and life. The north and south and east and west are sent to bring the fruits of harvest. The rough and smooth, the shadow and the sunshine, the trial and the blessing, are sent to make something out of us as moral and spiritual beings.

God is in all the airts, and in each of them. If life is bitter like the cold east winds and mists, or sweet and clear like southern skies and breezes, there is a deep meaning in it for us. They come to mould and form our character, not merely to register the thermometer of our Christian feelings. Sentimental heat or cold are really little in life; character and soul-strength are everything. It is not enough to watch the state of the weather; watch your character. It is not enough to register the doings of the thermometer; register the working of God's spirit in your heart.

The face of Beatrice became finer and more radiant to Dante as he ascended the higher towards Paradise. As we travel onwards from the cradle to the grave, and the winds of God beat upon our faces, shall His marvellous dealings and providential workings make our characters

finer, and our souls more radiant because our hearts are steadfastly set on the great things of God? Are these shaping us for the higher uses of His grace? That is the true test of all life's experiences.

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF
SORROW**

*"Ye shall be sorrowful, but
your sorrow shall be turned
into joy."*

(JOHN xvi. 20.)

XI

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SORROW

THE writers of Holy Scripture, whatever else they may have been, were men of deep feelings, and had plumbed the depths, and had known the strain and stress of living, and had understood many and borne most of life's burdens and tasks. They felt the need of human sympathy and had heard the cry of suffering hearts. There are not a few who reject the dogma of divine inspiration, but they cannot ignore a measure of spiritual insight and many flashes of genius, for the writers have proved themselves statesmen of the religious State, and their hearts pulsate with high thoughts that interpret our longings and dreamings, our trials and triumphs. Moses voiced the experiences of the Hebrews, their divine impulses as well as their sinful promptings and falls.

The Prophets entered largely into every experience of their times and felt with the people, and even more keenly than the people, the joys and the sorrows that meet in every life, and blend in the light and shadow of the crowd. The New

Testament writers were illuminated by Him who was and is the Light of the world and interpreted life's experiences by the impelling insight of His marvellous words and prayers and actions. They were all in one mind in this, that joy and sorrow, gladness and sadness intermingle in every life before its faltering footsteps cross the last valley men call Death. They do not always come to the same conclusion as our Lord: "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

Tennyson put in the grandmother's mouth these words: "Shadow and shine is Life, little Annie, flower and thorn." (This was exactly the interpretation of Moses to the Israelites, when he commanded them to take with them on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles branches of palm trees and willows of the brook and present them before God. The palm and the willow—symbols of gladness and sadness—were carried to the tents of old. Joy and sorrow are just as strangely interspersed with our Christian experiences to-day, and it is the contrast and antagonism of these that make human life so intricate.)

There must be some meaning in it all. In every month of the Calendar the lights and the shadows are mingled. Dark December and glorious June, murky November and clear spring-

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ing May are necessary to bring to full fruition the wealth of harvest. The earth needs light and darkness, heat and cold to bring the ripened grain.

There are surely great days in every life when palm branches, as it were, are strewn along life's pathway—days when all our dreams come true, when dark passions are conquered, when difficulties are overcome, and landscapes are lit with sunshine and gladness—moments at least when life's hidden fires burn with a bright intensity and joy flashes out, and the heart is triumphant. And yet even in the greatest of days, say, in the crowning of a king, or in a marriage service, very often, if not always, a tear drop falls. Why it comes men know not. Perhaps it is that the mystery of life's future baffles them, and hidden sorrows are in it, and the grave awaits them over the years beyond.

Jesus of Nazareth was coming back from a day of intense joy. He had cleansed the lepers, and raised the fallen and healed the sick. He was triumphant over disease and death, and in recognition of it all, men women and children strewed His entry into Jerusalem with palm branches and sang Hosannas to His great Name. But just as He passed through the Holy City's portals, the shadow of the Cross, with all its pains and

sorrows, loomed across His pathway, and the sting of the weeping willow touched His sacred heart.

To some extent, at least, Christ's life was an epitome of our own. There are days when the vista is heavenwards, and then may come weeks or months when life sees nothing ahead but valleys, and in a hidden corner lurks a grave. Sir Arthur Pearson wrote a fascinating book which he called "Victory over Blindness." Who can conceive of the sorrow that must have gripped Arthur Pearson's heart when he knew that blindness was upon him. His career ruined! light blotted out! despair in the heart! so we might feel about it. We would see nothing in it all but sorrow indescribable. But what are the facts? He gave his life, soul and body, for those who, like himself, were blind. Instead of despair, his whole life at, and for, St Dunstan's was a triumph. Thousands of people in despair were lifted above it who might never have been had Sir Arthur kept the great gift of eyesight. | "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy." In the heart of every hardship is there not some hidden joy?

There seems a big gulf fixed between joy and sorrow. One is sunshine, the other a cloud: one is music and the other a cry: one is like the

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warmth of summer and the other like the wailing winds of winter ; and yet how closely they are mingled in life !

On one occasion the late Rev. Dr Matheson of Edinburgh, blind himself, prayed : [“ Teach me the glory of my cross ; teach me the value of my thorn. Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have been my rainbow.”] He was really praying for the transmutation of sorrow.

The facts are indisputable that human life is made up to a large extent of joys and sorrows, happiness and bereavements, pains and pleasures ; and we must sooner or later face such facts, and endeavour to interpret them for our peace of mind and future contentment. We have often no power, and we cannot as a rule control, but we may interpret these facts. Religion comes to our help here. But some say, “ We have no religion and we find no use for it anyway.” I am aware of that, but I know also that the great majority of human beings have a religion of some kind and must have it. It matters not what kind, but it is there. The value of a religion is, that it interprets these facts of life. It endeavours to analyse and find some interpretation of our experiences that may put dignity and worth and hope into our life. We believe, and the over-

whelming majority in the British Empire believe, that the Christian religion is the best method and means of giving the interpretation to the facts of life. These people have come to the conclusion that it is better than Mohammedanism or Confucianism or Buddhism or no religion at all, in revealing to them the true inwardness of life ; because it gives them a spiritual interpretation of these facts.

It simply affirms a fact of experience and scientific truth when it says, " Life has its sorrows and pains and bereavements and crosses and cares," but Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, interprets all life to us when He says, " Sorrow is there and pain and travail and death, but there is a way out, a glorious way of transforming them into joy and gladness." This comes through faith in Him. We need the spiritual sense for the transformation of sorrow.

There is a peculiar type of belief even so-called Christian which interprets life as peculiarly sorrowful. It is interpreted in hymns such as one in Sankey's which says, " Go then ever weeping, working for the Master." It suggests that sorrow is uppermost, evil is triumphant, sadness prevails, bad people predominate. It is not the case : it is a false interpretation, a pessimistic miscalculation of the position. Take any street

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in a city or suburbs, and for every bad man there, you will find fifty good men: for every one sorrowful you will find fifty rejoicing: and for every really wicked man you will find at least twenty thoroughly good, anxious always to do the right. We must try to analyse the elementary facts aright, and not blame the Christian religion for having failed when the opposite is true. We are apt to think that our age alone is fuller than any other in problems and trials and cares. Is it so? The deep fundamental things abide and endure and are the same in every age. Birth and marriage and death are the prevailing and controlling factors of human life; and while these prevail—and they must till time shall cease—joy and sorrow, hunger and thirst, love and death, all arising out of these primary facts, shall lie in the eternal Heart for every one.

It is useless to ask, Why are these so unevenly distributed? It is wise to inquire, "What is the use of pain and loss and death? What shall be the end of it all?" While life shall last, every true Christian man and woman will have to wrestle at times and strive against depression and sorrow and even despair. But these are not permanent—they are ephemeral. Jesus said to the sorrowing disciples, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." And joy indescribable the

disciples had in the Christ and His faith after He had gone ; but it was no foolish optimistic belief that all was well with the world. No ! They knew that much in life was wrong, and they were full of a divine discontent to make the world better. There is yet in the heart of every Christian some sorrow, because of wrong and oppression and sinfulness, but this shall one day be turned into joy. This faith transforms life, and its sorrows and pains, and makes it glad and beautiful because God is in it. When we see life with Christ's eyes we shall take both gladness and sadness, palm branches and willows, and rejoice before God, for even life's sorrows give way to joy and hope.

FOLLOW THE GLEAM

*"Thou didst well that it was
in thine heart."*

(1 KINGS viii. 18.)

XII

FOLLOW THE GLEAM

Two streams of heredity flow into one great lake ; unite in one strangely human heart—the heart of King David. A king—yet not a king in one realm—the realm of his own heart. There is no doubt that he wanted to be good always, and yet he could not be. One day we see him clasp the hand of Jonathan in a friendship strangely spiritual and unselfish. On another day we are amazed to hear apparently canting hypocritical words used to screen a base sensual motive for taking the life of another friend, Uriah. The two streams of good and evil met in this great life and caused eternal strife in one true heart. That heart sometimes seethed in anger against wrong, at others it was swept by impurity ; again, it was calmed by generous affection, and anon, tempest-tossed by distrust and despair.

And yet in all his fascinating career, one passion runs through that human heart—the passion for God.

Some one has said that "a book is a man's

heart shouting from the housetops." This is specially true of the Psalms. The book proclaims the heart of the writer athirst for God. Through all its waywardness and callous perversity, it cried for the cleansing divine.

Men are dominated by the thoughts and emotions of the heart and out of it come the dreams and visions and resolves of a lifetime. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."

The Heart has its Dreams.

Life is ennobled by good dreams. They may come to men in the daytime, in the glare of the sun, in the evening twilight, as well as in midnight darkness. A young French barrister, mentally brilliant, with irresistible eloquence, had the world at his feet, and then one day he had a dream. It came into his heart in the midst of all his successes and overwhelmed his world of pleasure and ambition; and a friend found him alone in his room sobbing. What is the matter with Lacordaire? A dream—the dream of a heart broken by inward sin and failure, and a desire to be right with God. Some considered him a fool, but his magnificent successes as a great preacher of Christian joy and love and hope came from that dream. There come every few decades years of crass materialism, when the

best things—the spiritual and eternal—seem overwhelmed by dissipation and folly. Luther came at such a time with the dream of the spiritual Christ. The dream was a gleam of faith in Jesus Christ in the sixteenth century. It was well to have it in his heart.

After an act of great deception originated by material desires, which banished Jacob from father and mother and home, he lay down—tired and worried and discontented—beside the Bethel. He fell asleep and dreamed. It was the dream of a ladder reaching up to God, and angels scaling the heights and reaching the depth with messages to him from God. He awoke and the dream became a gleam lighting up his whole life with messages for the Israel of God.

A dream can be a gleam brightening the heart ; it can unfortunately be a gloom hurling the life down to dingy, murky sin and shame ; for out of the heart proceed “ evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, blasphemies,” and other sins that defile mankind. Dreams of that sort, sleeping or waking, should be cast out of a true heart, like a nightmare, by the breaking light of the morning.

The Heart has its Visions.

In the young heart of David a vision arose, a beautiful ideal, a fine religious inspiration to

build a Holy Temple for the worship of the true God. It was a glorious gleam that he carried in his heart through all the years of life. He did well to keep it in his heart.

In St Paul's, London, there is a statue of John Howard, a noted philanthropist who spent his life in trying to mend and improve the broken earthenware of humanity, in the shape of prisoners and outcasts. Shortly after it was placed there, the proprietor of a little shop in the Strand said to his young son that he was going to the Cathedral to see a new statue, and his son said he would go with him. While looking at the memorial, the boy asked who John Howard was, and what he had done. His father told him of the glorious work of Howard in British and European prisons, and a vision came to the heart of that boy. He, too, would be like Howard—a philanthropist. He studied for the ministry, became a preacher of the Gospel and did fine work in England, but the vision to be like John Howard never left him ; and the village of Reedham owes its orphan asylums, hospitals for incurables and many such institutions to the Rev. Andrew Reid, who had the vision in his young heart to become a Christian minister and philanthropist.

The Bible is a book that tells of many visions. The prophets were seers of visions, and according

to the Acts of the Apostles, it is to a vision at Troas that Europe owes its Christianity. The vision was very often an inspiration to do great things for God and humanity. Holy men all through the ages spoke as they were moved by such visions. Such men and women too, like Joan of Arc, shattered the belief that material force has absolute power over life. The spiritual insight knows better, for it has a sense of that

“ Sweet strange mystery
Of what beyond these things may lie
And yet remain unseen.”

When Paul saw the “man of Macedonia” in vision beckoning him, and heard the cry, “Come over into Macedonia and help us,” it opened up new vistas, lighted the way to fresh fields for gospel effort ; and the gleam led him onwards to lonely lands and persecution and suffering.

Visions have their price. They often mean loneliness. Men who have great foresight and see far ahead of their times must be lonely. Advance engineers have the roughest, loneliest time in tunnelling through mountains and finding paths for the men far behind. Paul was a pathfinder for the souls of others, and he was so because of his visions of truth and peace and love that came to him from God. The path was

lonely, but through everything and everywhere the gleam led to God. Men who follow the gleam, get the power into their lives that God is so willing to give; and that enables them to face facts and realise difficulties and dash out of the cup the rose water idea of religion which does nothing and leads to nothing. Prophets and seers were doers because they believed in their visions. They were never really pessimists, because they saw the truth and faced it, and in every crisis they had a remedy.

Emerson has said that "Character is the moral order seen through the individual nature." When men get the vision of God in the heart they know that it must be communicated to others, for divine things are revealed to us through human personality. Every age looks for men of vision who have seen into the secrets of eternal and unseen realms. And when it finds such a man it will follow even into the loneliness of the desert with Moses, or scale the heights with Paul. It is a pity for any nation when there are no men of vision in it, for it is a real philosophical truth that, "Where there is no vision the people perish." When visions of God come to us—visions of truth, purity, courage, faith and hope—let us keep them in the heart and follow the gleam, and we will find that

"God shows sufficient of His light
For those in the dark to rise by."

The Heart has its Resolutions.

Resolution to build a House of God kept humming its dream and song through all the king's life of stress and worry. It was at the back of his heart always; and yet for reasons that Scripture readers know he did not build it, but at the close of life he had the encomium of God, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart." Men are ruled by their resolutions, and when these are fixed in the heart they are of supreme importance in the life. Our resolutions make us or mar us. We become what we resolve. Paul became what he resolved on that day on the Damascus highway—a servant and follower of Christ.

We have to remember however that some dreams men have cherished, some visions they have seen, some resolutions they have made have not been realised in life. Our dreams do not all come true, but life would be a mirage without them. Our visions do not all lead into the Promised Land, but the heart would be sad without them. Determinations to build Temples of God may never become facts, but they keep us close to the Cross. Who can realise all his

visions? Who can at all times overcome the masterful overbearing principle of evil? Who can follow the gleam always in business and pleasure and bereavement and darkness? Who can see temples built with brick yet in the oven? Not one living soul can realise all his visions, and see all his dreams come true. But that does not detract from their power for good in forming the life. Without these dreams of good, and visions of right, and resolves of faith, the heart would be filled with evil passions and hideous purposes. So then let us keep the dream, and build temples in the heart, and if God sees fit to keep our stupid hands from soiling the edifice it is much better so.

To carry in the heart the purpose of building temples of beautiful Christian character is surely the romance of faith. These men and women do more marvellous things than they dream. David dreamt of a temple: that very dream inspired the Jewish House of God in every far-off land. Paul had the longing to preach in Asia, but the spirit of Jesus suffered it not, but afterwards a wider door in Europe was opened and he went to Rome and preached the Gospel there; and may it not be that through his words some soldier of the Roman invasion of Britain carried the Gospel of Jesus to our own beautiful land.

So then, although the dream of the heart may not be realised in us, God's overspreading providence is making the dream come true in turning many to righteousness, and making the Gleam burn brightly by lighting darkened lives with the love of God. Let us cherish the vision of faith in our hearts and follow the gleam of truth, for it leads in the end to God.

“ Not of the sunlight,
Not of the moonlight,
Not of the starlight !
O ! young Mariner,
Down to the haven
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel
And crowd your canvas,
And, ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the gleam.”

LIFE'S NECESSITIES

*"He would have given thee
living water."*

(JOHN iv. 10.)

"I am the bread of life."

(JOHN vi. 35.)

XIII

LIFE'S NECESSITIES

THE first conversation referred to appears to have been accidental. Christ, travelling from Jerusalem, halts at the wayside and sits beside a well. Dust-stained and weary, footsore and thirsty, hungry and fatigued, He rests His tired body beside this well in Samaria.

It is said by some that there is not a very wide margin between genius and insanity. Be that as it may, some of the greatest thoughts—thoughts that have moved the world to tremendous deeds—were uttered by men whom the world thought mad. "Paul," they cried, "thou art beside thyself, much learning hath made thee mad." The Court of Queen Mary thought John Knox worse than a fanatic, but the germs of truth that grew in future generations into freedom of conscience have falsified conventional opinion. It was against all preconceived notions that truths of great moment should be uttered outside the Temple by a common dust-stained traveller, hungry and thirsty, to an audience of only one,

and a woman, narrow in prejudice, full of traditional hatreds and not even respectable. In surroundings far removed from fame, Christ spoke words to that lonely heart-broken woman of Samaria that have blessed the faithful for nineteen centuries.

The men of the world were in the marketplace and in the forum eating and drinking of the best ; ships were sailing over the seas filled with wine of the finest ; merchants were making fortunes and amassing wealth that life would be far too short for them to enjoy ; and at that very time by Jacob's lonely well a young Nazarene spoke of the water of life, and of things precious, priceless and eternal, that money could never buy. The woman did not know and the world did not want to know that Jesus could give to them the water of life. The disciples were concerned about Him, for He had forgotten to eat, and He looked worn and weary, and they said, " Master, eat." " I have meat to eat that ye know not of, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me."

Some considerable time after this incident, the people who had followed Him to hear His teaching were hungry, and He fed five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fishes. The people were excited and interested, but He escaped

over the sea. They found Him again, and it was then that He declared in language unequivocal that He was the Bread of Life. In both instances His language was of course parabolical. He was leading on, by symbolic ideas, to show them secrets that for thousands of years were hidden—secrets that the greatest intellects everywhere had striven to find out. Speaking of the cold, clear, dripping water that soon must waste and grow murky, He led up to the thirst of the soul, yearning, striving, unsatisfied, that earth could not satisfy. This woman and thousands like her had been searching for centuries—asking the stars, invoking the oracles, and still there was no response except the dim vapourings of Phari-saical despair. Then came quite unexpectedly words of everlasting life—words from a living heart, burning with love divine, “The water that I shall give shall be a well of water springing up to everlasting life.” That was the water of life, the only water that could quench the thirst of the burning soul.

Our Lord used symbols that were natural and could not be mistaken. They were homely and impressive too. He had asked for water from Jacob's well. He had fed the hungry with bread. These two commodities—bread and water—were the *necessities* of life. We could not keep living

without them. Men can live without wine or cider or brandy or beer or whisky, or any such luxuries, but they cannot live without water. Grapes will not grow everywhere, but thirst is universal, and water springs up to quench that thirst in every land on earth. It is a necessity ; if it were not to be found, men would die of thirst.

The thirst of the soul is universal. It is confined to no class nor age nor clime ; it is in every heart. Christ alone can meet the universal need of man, and He can give the water of life. Natural hunger, too, is universal. Every child of woman born grows and lives because it is hungry : if it were not hungry it would decline and die. Bread is a necessity to satisfy that hunger, and corn grows practically everywhere ; so that bread is a food both simple and universal.

There are epicures in food as there are connoisseurs in drink. In great banquets there are delicacies and dainties, rare game and costly viands, caviare and creams and costly fruits from sunny climes at Christmas feasts, and at other seasonable times. These are for special occasions and particular events, but bread is needed every day, and by every class and all the year round. The king's child and pauper's child have to eat their daily bread.

Jesus said, " I am the Bread of Life," after He

had fed the hungry crowd with the five loaves of barley the day before, knowing that the hunger of the soul is universal. It was common barley bread used, but it was and still is the staff of physical life to many peasants in Europe to-day. Our Lord was not ashamed to take a common symbol and use it. He Himself is needed by all, by the king and the cottar, rich and poor, by a hungry, starving world. He is to them the Bread of Life, to satisfy the hunger of the soul.

Systems of philosophy are altogether different from the religion of Christ. They are framed by devices of art for persons who are very superior. They are not meant for the man in the street, or humble working people. Even the Pharasaic faith was exclusive and impossible to many. The Stoical creed did not cater for the weak and the erring. It was meant for the intellectuals and the élite of a particular class. It held no message of hope and no word of mercy to the great crowd of ordinary men and women. That is where they failed and must fail. It cannot be otherwise, and so the Child of Mary—who called Himself the Son of man—led the people with thirst and hunger of body to the real meaning of life.

The hungry body is a fact, a necessity of humanity, but it is not all by any means, and

Jesus led them step by step to what was really the all important. The material part is strangely joined to the immaterial part which is of paramount importance. From the material earthly bread which was eaten by the crowd, He led them to Himself, the heavenly Bread which was the staff of the spiritual life. Man cannot live by bread alone. Other things are necessary, even in this life, for one who wishes truly to live. A Garibaldi could live in a garret taking only enough bread and water to keep soul and body together, but he lived really, more truly than many kings. He lived for honour, faith, purity, hope and God. That was real life. Things like these are eternal, and Christ gives us these ideals and aspirations and longings and desires, and so becomes to us the Bread of Life.

I think the Christian public need to-day a restatement of Christ's teaching. Conventions and negations have grown up everywhere, and the real kernel, the heart of the religion of Jesus, means little more to many now than the faith of the God of Israel meant to the Pharisees of old. They were living on traditions and shibboleths, which meant nothing to the true life of the soul. This is not bread but a stone. The world to-day wants the living Bread, and the promises of all the political parties in any epoch of history won't

satisfy the hunger of the heart for the bread of life, nor the thirst of the soul for the water of life. That cannot come from earth, it must come from above. "I am," said Christ, "that bread of life which came down from heaven."

We cannot fully or adequately explain how He is so. The wisest experts cannot tell us definitely and exactly how bread and water are transformed into blood and muscle and iron and nerve for the body, but plain men don't trouble about them. They know the fact by experience. Life—natural life—is mysterious. So is the spiritual. "I live by the faith of the Son of God," said Paul. Who could explain that? But Paul knew the fact by experience. He knew that Christ was the sustaining power of life. When the soul was storm-beaten, when the winds of life were contrary, when his legs were feeble, climbing life's hill, when his heart was torn and bleeding by the thorns of temptation, Christ was the Bread of Life, to support, strengthen, and save.

How did Christ use the necessities—the bread and water of life? He used them for the supreme end; "I have meat to eat that ye know not of; My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me." Bread is useless unless it is eaten. Water is useless unless it is drunk. Christ Jesus, the Bread of Life and the Living Water, is useless to

the world that is hungry and thirsty of soul because men and women will not come to Him and appropriate Him by a living faith. By faith we live on Christ. He is spiritual nourishment. He is the strength of the soul. When we have this power we, like Christ, do the will of God. It is the power of all progress and the secret of new life ; and when we have it in experience, this frail, earthly, fleeting life can never be broken by death, for it shall be in man a well of water, springing up to everlasting life.

HOPE DEFERRED

" My days are past, my purposes are broken off."

(JOB xvii. 11.)

XIV

HOPE DEFERRED

APPEARANCES are very often utterly false or delusive, because they misrepresent the motive or incentive of the reality behind them. The sick bed, intense pain, intolerable agony, and a sinking soul may draw words out of the mouth quite untrue to the meaning of the heart. A palsied man is a bad interpreter of the merits of a life's worth: and the looker-on may be the worst judge of all. Many a lonely desolate heart has cried in a fit of the "blues," "My days are gone, my expectations are perished, my purposes are broken off." Job is not the only historical character who has wakened to find that his purposes have been crossed, his banking account has dwindled, and his health has suffered irreparable loss. The last ten years have seen eyes grow dim watching for better times, have heard sighs breathing of disappointed hopes, and hearts waiting for ships that have never come in. Their plans are shattered, their purposes are broken off.

The man who uttered these pathetic words had

everything around him to brighten life and make it glad and happy. He was well-to-do, had no anxieties about money matters, and the family circle included no skeletons, bad marriages, tragic mistakes, or foolish escapades against the honour of his name and the fine tradition of his house. And as far as we can gather from the narrative he was strong, robust, and healthy, and never knew what illness meant until the dark speck in the horizon made its appearance, and grew and expanded till the whole sky was darkened and the atmosphere around the home of this faithful man was virulent and poisonous. The slow revolving wheel of fortune robbed him bit by bit of all his cherished possessions, and, what was infinitely worse, it was stealing away his faith in the goodness of life and the justice of providential dealings.

Professor A. B. Davidson said more than once, that to his thinking one of the saddest sentences in the Bible was this: "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall." He was thinking of spiritual and moral declension more than physical failure. Still, reaction between them is inevitable. The invalid can hardly avoid some lapses of courage. A tired, suffering man has no mastery over himself and cannot be a true judge of his real self. Hope, that bright beacon light shining over

a life, begins to glimmer and fade, when nerves are jingling, vital forces are lethargic, and the body aches. In many cases not one word is uttered. Men who have faced life in the sunshine of God's goodness are too chivalrous for that; and like the gallant young soldier that Browning speaks of, hide their wounds and face the world with a smile.

We are struck with the humanness of this old-world hero. Everything was going well, and all his hopes were gratified when there came a sudden terror of which he had no suspicion, and it rained showers of losses and disappointments over his life, until his home was really flooded with an avalanche of woe and dismay. He was determined, being the true upright man that he was, to do, and had been doing, great things for God and the Right, and now he could not finish them. Yet he tried hard to cover his disappointment with a smile. One has only to recall an instance of a man, next to the king in his country's confidence, the late Mr Bonar Law, Ex-Prime Minister, whose ambitions were noble, whose aspirations were excellent, and whose deeds were peerless, at a time when his own heart was breaking for the loss of his gallant sons, and his body was suffering the intolerable anguish of an incurable disease. He still kept silent till the end,

when he was forced to say, "I can go on no longer." It was just the Hebrew's cry, "My purposes are broken off."

It is not unwise to endeavour to probe the meaning of such happenings. It is not enough for us

" To bear

Without resentment the Divine reserve."

There must be some meaning in the facts of life, and it is not quite enough to take them lying down, without some mental effort and spiritual understanding. Charles Lamb wrote once to Coleridge about "the silent thoughts arising in a good man's mind in lonely places." Like Lamb, humanity has been trying in the silences of the night and in the lonely places of the soul to unravel life's meaning from other men in vain, as Job had done from his three friends. Happy is the man whose mind turns to the Source and Origin of all life and asks its solution from God, who dwells amidst the silences and yet sees all. He pierces through the darkness and understands the human contest and broken purposes, and knows that even calamity has a meaning in the highest heaven.

" There the tears of earth are dried,
There its hidden springs are clear,
There the work of life is tried,
By a juster judge than here."

The case for orthodox Israelitish' religion was perhaps put well by the three pillars of the Temple who sat beside the sick man's bed. It may have been the recognised belief, but intuition taught the sufferer that it was false in his case.

The shallow, cruel creeds which, through the ages, have been driven into men's minds by some teachers who have obscured the truth and hidden the true God from men's minds, we may believe at twenty: but when a man expounds the faith that God is responsible for the shattered lives of war, the starvation of children, and the sins that have brought ruin on innocent lives, to the third and fourth generation, that no thinking man will believe. No self-respecting heart could pray to such a God with reverence. But is He such? We cannot see very far with human eyes into the problem of evil, but we are certain that the trail of wrong and shame and disease and death which sin has brought is impossible in the sphere of God's responsibility. Injustice wrong anguish and calamity were the result of the evil passions and selfishness of men. God's only thought for man was peace and love, not war and hate. War and hate and wrong and pain are the results of man's sin. They were never caused by God. Are we to be resigned to these and take them lying down? The cry of broken purposes is an assault on these

by Job, although he manifested his marvellous patience towards God's permission of these distresses and troubles in his life.

Somehow through everything the soul of the sufferer knew that God was at the heart of life and must prevail in time, although he had to admit that everything he loved had gone. Many a heart utters the same cry to-day, "*Everything is gone.*" But is it? The healing wings of Time hover round the home and heart, and new sympathies, fresh thoughts, renewed influences are set at work, and out of sorrow and calamity there have come healing and love and finer service.

To begin life is not the same as to finish it. To dedicate our life to God at the sunrise is a glorious resolve, but the choice involves following Christ through the intervening years till the sun has vanished in a beautiful sunset behind the western hills.

" Let no man think that sudden, in a minute,
All is accomplished and the work is done ;
Though with thine earliest dawn, thou should'st
begin it,
Scarce were it ended with the setting sun."

We must, for the better development of our spiritual and moral character, suffer broken purposes, and try to mend them again with the

strength of Christian bravery. There should be no hopelessness on the road where Christ is traveling. Purposes are not crossed for ever, and they are never broken for evil in a good man's life. They should control, but never break, the man with God's light in his soul. Abraham Lincoln, one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of America's sons, was up against adverse circumstance and opposition and broken plans. His mind was ever clear on one point—that he was God's instrument, and his part was to follow the faith and do the will of God. He faced his responsibilities in that spirit of faith. Before his assassination he said in a great speech, "I have not controlled events; I would rather say that events have controlled me. But I have met them all with this faith."

If one should sit down to calculate the horoscope of the future, it must end in a wistful dream of uncertainty unless there is seen one reality there. No one can rely wholly in his own right arm. Purpose or circumstance may weaken it. Then on what can one rely? Amidst every broken plan and loss and death, the love of One—the Christ of Calvary—is loyal through time and death and eternity. When sorrow comes and plans are ruined, as Job's were, then underneath are the Everlasting Arms.

DEPOSING THE PAST

*"Sleep on now, and take
your rest. Rise up, let us go."*
(MARK xiv. 41 and 42.)

XV

DEPOSING THE PAST

"THE King is dead. Long live the King," is a call to break with the past, as well as an urgent decision to depose it and enter a new kingdom—that of the future.

To the disciples even, in that strangely fatal evening among the groves of Gethsemane, it was almost incomprehensible that they were so soporific when their Master was in the agony of despair, and yet it had to be relegated to the broken things in life's caravanserai that must be cast behind their backs for ever. Time is present only once : it cannot be relived except in memory ; and memory is too often an agonising way of resuming the past. The epoch, now, can never come back ; this hour must be left behind for ever as soon as we leave these sacred walls.

The joys, opportunities, possibilities, of the present are infinite ; but to-morrow they will be irrevocable, and no power in earth can bring them back to us. Even to Jesus, Gethsemane was gone for ever ; He left it behind and rose up and faced

the soldiers, and the bitter pain of the Cross. He, the Master of life, knew what the overmastering principle meant for Him and for the Apostles. That hour in the darkened garden would never more return to them—neither now nor in the long years ahead—except in melancholy and remorse. Emotions over it could never undo and never repair anything, and so the Master bade them “Rise up, and go away and leave it.”

If memory is a hindrance, depose it : if some habit is a clog on the wheels of progress, break with it : if emotion unfits for life's battle, relegate it to oblivion.

Life is thorny and trackless, and we need grace and common sense to tackle it in the fleeting present. It is not possible to do that efficiently if we permit our wasted sleepy Gethsemanes to rob us of hope and faith and energy, and the cheerfulness necessary for present duty and action. There are possibly things in the past that are utterly destructive to the present, and yet they are hugged to the heart as a kind of precious heritage. I am not speaking now of things that are beautiful and inspiring and alluring in the far away : things that belong to the early affection—the green paths and meadows now grown misty, and hedgerows chirping and singing their message of love and joy as we plucked the cowslip

and the primrose. These belong to the pure affections and are rooted in the heart and make life richer in memories.

“ The grand road from the mountain goes shining to the sea,

And there is traffic on it, and many a horse and cart,
But the little roads of Cloonagh are dearer far to me,
And the little roads of Cloonagh go rambling through
my heart.”

These memories do not sap but inspire. I am speaking rather of emotions that should be deposed because they do nothing but weaken and destroy. And one of these is *remorse*, or the gnawing pain of guilt or anguish. It is a very different thing from repentance, which is contrition for sin, producing a desire for newness of life. Remorse serves no purpose in life except evil, for it enervates, unmans, exhausts, and unhinges the resolutions and energies absolutely necessary for the good of the present. Remorse may not have in it guilt or wrong-doing, it may simply be anguish of mind on account of the refusal of a position which has turned out much superior to the one now held. It may also mean grief for a choice made, which in the revelation and unfolding of circumstances has proved little less than a tragedy. And many other things that cannot be mentioned are included in the emotion

of remorse. What good purpose can it serve—even remorse for wickedness? It cannot atone; it cannot remove, for the deed is past and done with for all time. Could it repair, or restore, or invigorate to new life, as repentance can do, it would be a virtue. Since it cannot, it is a vicious encumbrance to life's best aims and should be broken with for ever.

Grief, on the other hand, is of a different nature. Yet it partakes of something that dwells in the past. Grief can only come into some event or episode or failure in the past. There are griefs that are sacred to memory, like grief for one who walked the little roads of Cloonagh. There were grief and regret in the hearts of Peter and James and John for their lethargic stupor in Gethsemane, but Christ knew that no purpose could be served by dwelling on it too much, and so He bade them arise. Those we have loved, who are gone, have left us and our grief cannot recall them, cannot comfort them, and cannot help us. We grieve too much unwisely, when we set apart our whole life to sorrow for a loved and revered one, to the destruction of all hope and joy in life. Those we have loved and lost would not have it so, for exaggerated grief is not honouring to the dead. To hold them dear, keep them in our hearts, and preserve their memory sacred

is holy and invigorating, but grief which darkens the present should be held in check. One emotion should not dominate the human heart, for there are many others.

A bright young man—a minister's son—was killed some years ago in a railway accident. His father, Rev. Thomas Waugh, at a meeting in Oldham said, "Not until five weeks ago did my wife and I feel able to go to the wardrobe and examine the contents of the pockets of the clothes my lad wore when he was killed. In the breast pocket we found a card very much soiled and finger-marked, as if it had been often read, bearing these words: "*My resolve.*"

"I shall pass this way but once, therefore any kind word I can speak, or kind action I can do, shall be done now, as I shall not come this way again."

His father and mother were comforted, and useless grief which was unfitting them for life was broken off, and his memory made them strong for present duty.

Despondency is another emotion that is ruinous to life. It is felt in the present but has its cause in the past. It arises out of disappointment with the past. Things have not planned out as was anticipated. Money has been lost, business has

gone back, health has been shattered, the family has done badly ; either one or more of these has sapped the life of hope and courage. It tells a man that the case is desperate and nothing can be done, and it may lead to suicide or the asylum. Had even Judas repented, in addition to having remorse and despondency, he would not have laid down his life criminally in the field of blood. Christ's look of love and forgiveness led Peter out of the Judgment Hall to shed penitential tears of sorrow and hope.

Anything in the past that poisons the springs of life and weakens purpose and saps hope should be broken with. Christ's call is to rise and act. Henley's little poem is excellent as a Stoic's confession of faith.

“ In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.”

But there is more than that needed in the battle of life. The something more is in Christ's call to work—something that will prevent the past from destroying the present—something that will enable men to break away from, and depose these moods of heart and soul that consume and devastate. In that something God must be.

Wordsworth speaks of the water-lily " whose head floats on the tossing waves " and yet " lives and thrives " because its root is fixed in " stable earth." Our roots of faith and hope must be fixed on One, spiritual and eternal, if we are to depose and crush out of life these tempers that stultify our best resolutions.

Life is after all largely experimental, and if there is not vision and faith and God in our experiments, man soon comes to the lethargy of death. When Jesus said, " Let not your heart be troubled," He used the Greek verb *τὰράσσειν*, meaning disturb, and this word (*υπαγία*) expresses in English the state of undisturbedness, not a very nice, yet an expressive word. He meant by this that they—even after He had left them—should possess a rest of soul, a peace of life, in all their battles for the Cross ; in every disappointment, in every act of treachery, in every heartless experience in their attempt to lead men to God, and even in every death. That is what He meant, and it is possible, but only possible to those who believe in God : " Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me." That was the only way. The past can never ruffle it because the past is God's. The future cannot disturb it, because He holds the key to the unknown future. The past is

done with : let it sleep, but rise up out of spiritual lethargy, and claim the present for Heaven and Righteousness and Hope.

Moses had died, and the death dew had hardly frozen on his brow when God said to Joshua, "Moses is dead, now therefore arise, go over Jordan thou and all this people." It was a stupendous task to undertake, but he took it for God. "Rise up, let us go." Moses is dead. Peter, James and John are dead. The leaders of old, who have spread the faith of Jesus far and wide, are all dead, but still the message of the eternal Christ rings forth, "Rise up, let us go." He is with us. The God of all the ages is near at hand. Do not be disturbed : "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee."

UNEXPECTED SPRINGS AND
PALMS

*'They came to Elim, where
were twelve wells of water, and
threescore and ten palm trees.'*

(EXOD. XV. 27.)

XVI

UNEXPECTED SPRINGS AND PALMS

OUR finite minds read some things into events that they do not contain. Children believe innumerable things about Christmas—wonderful to them—which adults, perhaps regretfully, see no longer. When our Lord walked around the hills and talked beside the shores of Galilee, He did many remarkable and surprising things: they were not such to Him. He called many of His doings signs, but never once did He call them miracles. They were natural to Him, but after He had left His beloved followers they read miracles and wonders into all He said and accomplished. Whereas in many of the events there was nothing miraculous at all. It was because of their unexpectedness that their minds were filled with surprise.

The Israelites were on the march where they were met with disappointment disillusionment and distress on the way to Canaan. Then came Marah, when they were dying with thirst, and the waters were so bitter that they could not drink

of them. The burning sands and blistered feet were bad enough, but what were these to thirst unquenched looking on the bitter poisoned waters? Hope was almost dead, and surrender was eating into their souls, when they got the big surprise of Elim. Its unexpectedness in this pestilential desert filled them with wonder, for they saw before their eyes twelve clear sparkling streams and felt the shade and the shelter of seventy palm trees.

Life is full of *unexpected* things if we use our eyes and keep an open mind.

The days before the Hebrews came to Elim were some of what men call the "bad days" of life. We all know them. These are the days in which even the saints break down. They cannot indeed be accounted for. There is no moving cause. In these bad days the clerk makes mistakes, the artisan misses the nail and hits his finger, the artist uses blue instead of violet, the doctor diagnoses erroneously, and the writer cannot find an idea and throws his manuscripts into the fire in utter despair. The soul, too, is an unimaginative blank, and instead of finding a reason or a remedy to calm or soothe, it becomes muffled like a gouty foot or a neurotic arm, and begins to murmur, and blame, and sting relatives and friends who are dearest. The heart cannot

feel justly in these bad days. We do not know ourselves. We feel we have failed, that our motives are degraded. Hope is misty, faith is sceptical, and love is querulous of God and man. The eye sees life distorted like a false mirror. A little fault is magnified into a crime. A trifling error in a worker is exaggerated into a cause of dismissal. A lack of clear water at Marah throws the Isrealites into gloom and multiplies their distress. Whatever may be the cause of these bad days, if there be any, whether psychological or physiological, it is ephemeral and accidental. The man who has found his soul, like Moses, will brush out of the way these bad emotions or Marahs, and over the brow of the hill and across the weary plain he will press towards Elim, with its unexpected springs and sheltering palm branches. The Israelites never expected such joys after Marah, but they were there all the time.

There are always some, perhaps more than we know, who imagine they were born under an unlucky star. The universe exists to destroy them. The invisible forces of nature are crammed with one purpose—to beat them. The Community of the unemployed, seeking in vain, feel crushed and hopeless. They feel as if the laws of nature are favourable to the survival of the fittest and they

are not among them. Confronted by what they perceive to be a heartless world they hear desolating voices :

“ The stars,” one whispers, “ blindly run ;
A web is woven across the sky,
From out waste places comes a cry,
And murmurs from the dying sun.

And all the phantom nature stands
With all the music in her tone
A hollow echo of my own—
A hollow form with empty hands.”

But that is the faith of the Pagan : it lacks the virile expectancy of the Christian who knows something very different—a phase of life which is truer, a meaning of life which is higher, and clasps by faith the Hand of the Creator who lifts a man by touching his will and gives him courage to climb over the hills to Elim. If there had been true faith in the soul of the Israelites, they would have expected the God who called them out of Egypt to provide life's necessities, and they should have had the curiosity of faith to look for the springs and the manna. If we are doing our duty honestly, God has always the unexpected and the hidden things to attract and allure His children.

The Israelites were to take possession of the

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promised land for God and the spiritual religion. That was to be their career. It was extremely inspiring at the beginning, especially when the Red Sea divided and the host of Hebrews crossed dry shod and their cruel Egyptian oppressors pursuing, perished in the waters. But there were few days like that to follow. There were many Marahs and Kibroth-hattaavahs, and ordinary marchings and campings on sultry plains and burning sands. These were all in the way of the wilderness, in their career. They face us these days too. They happen to us. It is not a magnificent career to have to face. It is a monotonous dreary journey, unpromising, uncongenial, menial, and disappointing, and many people consider it quite unworthy of them. They think they were made for better things than totting figures and selling hats and building walls and digging drains and teaching and cooking and mending. That may be the folly of self-esteem.

Whatever may be the cause of discontent in our case to-day, it was stigmatised as sin when Moses spoke to the Hebrews. Hattaavah was full of graves; perhaps these were better under the sod, but unfortunately they—like many in our own times—left behind them sons and daughters and others to reap the harvest of

sorrow and pain that these had never sown. They forgot their divine origin and therefore expected nothing from God. The dismal days we have passed and are passing through came to the world, because Kaisers and Czars and Governors were so blind and unexpectant and void of curiosity in spiritual matters that they saw no Elims. If they had the curiosity of faith, they should have heard the urgent and warning voice of the Creator God saying, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

"The world is weary of new tricks of thought
That lead to nought :
Sick of quack remedies prescribed in vain
For mortal pain :
Yet still above them all one figure stands
With outstretched hands."

The tragedy of Europe would not be in vain if we had curiosity to enquire for God and the faith to expect Him, after our Marahs, at Elim.

There is no life so lowly, so mean, so unnoticeable, but may find joys unexpected and blessings unanticipated along the road of duty. It was because the Israelites pushed onwards they came to Elim. It was a miserable bit of the dreary wilderness they were crossing when suddenly a great surprise of God's goodness came to their souls. Blessing came while they were doing

their trivial tramp and common drudgery. It usually comes that way and we have no right to expect God's blessing any other way. At the same time utterly unexpected awards of His love and goodness and mercy come to us all along the path of duty. It was not a likely place to find the twelve clear rushing streams, but very often the finest and purest experience comes unforeseen. Matthew found Christ at the receipt of custom, Nicodemus found Him in the darkness of night, Mary found her greatest blessing washing His feet in Simon's house. The refreshing experiences of Elim come from unexpected sources, but we have to be on the way to Canaan to get them. Napoleon once said, "When I was in my prime, I could get thousands to follow me, but I had to be there." He had to be on the spot when they flocked to his standard.

To receive the great blessings God has in store for us, we must be in His Kingdom on the spot where He travels, in the spirit of duty. David was quietly attending his father's sheep when he was called to a Throne. They may have been hard days for David, but God was in them, and found His young servant doing his best in the monotonous life of the shepherd. And so, believe me, does God come to men to-day. In the wilderness of irksome toil and labour, He is there.

In the wonders of His love, the visions that touch our imagination, and in the germs of truth that come to us from the teaching of Jesus, He is there. He blesses us in the calls of honour, and in the cry of the broken-hearted whom we may try to heal. These impulses urge us on to the Elims where God gives His followers of the water of life, clear as crystal, unexpected blessings to us, but they should not be, because they are all hidden in the great Heart of the Eternal Christ who is ever with those who love Him as Comrade and Friend.

In that faith we live ; in that faith we can dare to die. In the glamour of youth, in the stormy days of manhood's striving, and in the shadowed peace of the sunset's glow, let us clasp to our hearts, let us cherish in our souls, visions and dreams of the life here and the life beyond, sunlit always by Love Divine.

A SILENT GOD

" *Be not silent to me.*"

(Ps. xxviii. 1.)

XVII

A SILENT GOD

CONFIRMED readers of romances and fairy tales choose several methods of solving the problem of the endings.

One flits through a book like a butterfly over a garden of blooms, and reads only the things that please, and gets swiftly to the end.

Another rushes through it, like a war correspondent, for the latest news to wire home.

Some take the method *à posteriori*. They get to the end first, and endeavour to deduce the unknown beginnings from what is known of the ending. They can but guess the possible happenings in the history of the characters.

Others read every word carefully and refuse to pass a single sentence till they come to the end.

Few indeed who read a book will note its omissions and take into account the things not stated. The silences of some great author or statesman are well worth considering, for in most instances it is much easier to speak than

to be silent. Wasn't it Carlyle who said that the silences of Cromwell were eloquent and the man who would study them might be richly rewarded? How many have read the Bible and human life and have taken note of the silences of God, or have considered the reason for divine deafness to man's unheeded cry? It was thoughts like these in the sensitive poet's mind that made Tennyson sing :

“ But what am I ?
An infant crying in the night :
An infant crying for the light :
And with no language but a cry.”

The human mind has searched from the beginning of time for definite knowledge of God's personal characteristics. The world, its marvellous design, the sun moon and stars, sea and air and seasons, keep humming in the heart of humanity that God exists and reigns and is great beyond all comprehension, but as to exhaustive and minute knowledge of His nature and life and action we may search in vain, for we cry to a silent God.

The soul of man in all ages has ever been a subject for philosophers and psychologists and spiritual searchers. Conan Doyle and modern spiritualists are not the first who tried to demon-

strate the existence of the soul and its persistence after that state that we call death. The craving of the human heart is still the same in every generation; and although war and the consequent destruction of the body of man has accentuated the overwhelming desire to know where the soul that left that precious body is, and what it does, and how it is clothed, yet Spiritualism is no new truth, but it is a great subject for search, for thousands and thousands have tried to pierce the shadows, and see beyond the gulf into the far beyond, and enter with sensuous mind into the light of eternity.

“ Oh, Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be.”

But hitherto they have always come to a boundary beyond which they have never passed. Men and women taking the last look into the eyes of loved ones would give all they have to know more, but again the human heart cries to a silent God.

Prayer to God is the desire of the soul in need to get from Him the thing it wants. All men and women, good and bad, high and low, heathen and Christian, offer at times a prayer like this. But true prayer is the offering up of our desires in

the name of Christ for things agreeable to His will. It is a craving of the Almighty's aid in getting or giving us what is beyond our power or reach. Sometimes even a cry like this is to a silent God, and there may be very good reason for silence.

During the ministry of Jesus He cured a demented man at Gadara. The man had been full of devils and Jesus cast them out of this poor soul. The devils or evil spirits prayed to be allowed to enter the swine, and Christ permitted it, and the swine ran headlong into the sea. The people of Gadara were ignorantly afraid of Christ's power, and besought Him to depart, and He departed by ship to the other side. But the poor demoniac, now healed and sane and loyal to the Christ who saved him, prayed that Jesus might allow him to follow Him to Galilee, and yet He was silent and refused this request—silent to such a prayer and why? Surely there was a good reason. There was keen disappointment in the poor demoniac's heart. It would have been great to follow Christ with heartfelt love for a healed life.

There was, however, real meaning in the refusal. It was deep love and pity for dead Gadara. So Jesus sent him back a saved man to serve. It was an object lesson. The people who had known him—furious and demented among the tombs,

unfit for the dwellings of men—would wonder at the power of God. Nothing on earth, no words, no thoughts, no sermon could move them like that living witness to the power of Jesus, and so He was silent. There were others to work for God in Galilee. There were Peter and James and John and the rest, but God had need of this man at his own home, and therefore did not give him his wish ; so He sent him to pray and stay and work for Him in dark dead godless Gadara.

I think it was the poet Whittier who said :

“ May God forgive the child of dust
Who seeks to know, where faith can trust.”

Some great souls even say that God is silent because He does not care. The revelation of Holy Scripture does not take that view. An old prophet affirms that He is silent because He loves. “ He will rejoice over thee, He will be silent in His love.” God has always shown reserve even in the intimacy of His love. His refusals to the earnest cry of the heart seems so cruel and devoid of love. One thinks an answer to prayer would have made all the difference and it seemed so harsh that the Almighty was deaf to the cry. But one may live to know that His silence was in love. “ Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” The silence of God to that cry saved

the world. His very silence was love. There was some mysterious trouble at the heart of St Paul. He merely hints at it as "a thorn in the flesh." It may have been a delicate body, or temptation to a besetting sin, or fear of failure in the life of faith; we cannot tell, but he prayed that it might be taken from him, and God was silent to that cry. It was not in anger He refused to answer, but rather to enrich and sanctify and enable Him to lead others to a fuller faith.

God is sometimes silent to the cry of the heart that He may test the faith and urge to greater zeal.

The woman of Canaan came to Jesus and prayed Him earnestly to heal her daughter, but He answered her not a word. Then she came again saying, "Lord, help me." He was not silent now but kept her waiting and praying, still testing her faith. Again she pleaded that the dogs, even the little dogs, eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Christ was abundantly satisfied and said, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." God will not be silent always to the yielded heart. The answer may not be just what is expected, but it is enough to know that it will bring blessing of soul when His own hand will chase away the doubts and shadows.

Many a Christian man or woman prays that the dear child at death's door may be spared. Yet God is silent and the child passes. That is one of the harsh mysteries of life which human hearts, writhing in pain, cannot understand. No man can; but may not the silence of God interpret unspeakable mercy to the child? The all-seeing eye of God may have seen future pain and agony and sorrow indescribable in the life He has taken to the Better Land.

A young girl in her twenties loses her fiancé. She prays beside his dying bed that he might be spared, that life might not be a desert of death. God is silent. What possible good could come out of that? For him, we do not know, for he passed into the keeping of life eternal. For her, a vow that her life would know no love, no passion, no distraction, but the overmastering desire to save and lift and help the sisterhood of the world and draw them to the Cross. Thousands of girls have blessed the day that Francis Willard bowed the knee to the silent will of God.

Some day God will draw us into the secret of His silences, and the heart that trusts can keep the tryst till then.

“ No cloud across the sky but passes at the last,
And gives us back the face of God once more.”

God is sometimes silent because He has spoken often, and there is no more to be said since men have not heeded His word.

Jesus was before Pilate on trial for his life. Then He was arraigned before Herod and this man, whom Jesus called a fox, questioned Him, but Jesus answered him nothing. Why has He kept this awful silence for Herod? Because all pure desires were destroyed; the man was actually despiritualised. John the Baptist had warned him; Jesus he had heard of, but he looks on Him as a trickster, a conjurer, a playactor, because the spirit of evil had eaten into his life, and when he puts debasing and insulting questions to Jesus, He answers never a word. It is another fearful case of "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone."

It is a momentous truth this silence of the Saviour to Herod.

To have spoken to him would have done no good. He had smothered, nay expelled, the spiritual instinct given to every one when he trifled with his convictions and beheaded John the Baptist. His fate was made. His own hand had sealed it, and when the calm, pure, suffering face of Jesus turns to him, and listens to his godless, mocking, taunting voice, the Saviour was silent. In the other instances we have mentioned, the

silence to the heart's cry was in love, to test, save, heal, or lift to Himself. But in this instance—and it is the only one—the silence is the silence of Divine contempt.

The thorn-crowned face is looking on, appealing, pleading ; let it not plead in vain. If a stand is taken beside the Christ, He will not be silent to one's call, and He interprets the will of God. When men learn to understand the purpose of God, they will realise that even God's silences manifest the unspoken love of His heart.

TIME IS WHISPERING

*"Thy speech shall whisper
out of the dust."*

(ISA. xxix. 4.)

XVIII

TIME IS WHISPERING

THIS is a very old prophecy written by Isaiah of events happening in 703 B.C. The 29th chapter is an oracle, difficult and obscure. Prophets of God, like poets, are not ordinary men; they speak of deep things, in a language sometimes startling and provoking; at other times low and murmuring, but always seeking to arouse and arrest. The prophet Isaiah had the flame smouldering in the heart. The occasion, the event would light the fire.

Donald Hankey did not know that he had the heart of a poet and the soul of a saint—full of thoughts sweet, reverent, spiritual, and divine—until intense reality of war terror and death, and the whisperings of things unseen, fanned the embers in a blaze of fire.

Bairnsfather did not know he had the genius of the artist, had never drawn a figure in his life, but he was faced with facts tragic and terrible, and that gift—the gift of humour that saves so many in a time of trouble or danger—painted

"Old Bill" in his imagination. His sketches, drawn in trenches amidst appending tragedies, were forced on him by some inward power, and thousands of soldiers everywhere seeing them, laughed and jested when without them they might have suffered terror and distress. The occasion forced the hand of the artist Bairnsfather, now famous the world over.

Tragedy was impending in Israel: the soul of Isaiah felt it. Jerusalem, city of David, was hastening to doom. Reason and conscience were stifled by political security and a soulless religion. He saw a siege or attack coming and cried, "Ariel, Ariel, city where David encamped, moaning and bemoaning, is coming to thee, yet she shall be to me as Ariel." It appears enigmatic, but it seems to forecast that in a year or so God will straighten the city Jerusalem, whose inhabitants are so careless, and she shall be full of lamentation. Nevertheless, the city will be a true Ariel—God's hearth—and it will be in the end His own shrine and sanctuary.

The warning by the prophet advances through the first eight verses of this chapter. Time is whispering, has whispered long, but still unheeded there must come storm and earthquake and flame of fire on David's city, called often City of God.

It would appear that only the few can read the

warnings of God from the whisperings of Time. Nature is not really boisterous ; she is quiet and still for the most part. Even the creation was silent. God said (did not shout or thunder it aloud, He said), " Let there be light, and there was light," and from that day all the beautiful colouring has clothed the trees in June, and there have come on the shrubs and flowers the yellow and gold and crimson and violet, with scarcely even a whisper. The world is clothed every year in a robe of perfect beauty and we are hardly aware of it, for it comes silently, quietly, but the whispering of the leaves in slow expansion tells us they have come.

Before Jesus left the Twelve, He said, " A little while and ye shall see Me, and again a little while and ye shall not see Me." They listened, then not understanding, whispered, " What is this ? We cannot tell what He saith." They did not grasp all at once, that He spoke of the cross and His going to the Land Beyond. Knowledge comes to us quietly and gradually ; sometimes in the night watches truth whispers its messages into our ears.

What boy and girl ever appreciated a father's or mother's love and care for them while still in the home. The whispering of time in another home, or other land, tells of affection, the half of

which had never been realised. The deepest things come to us in a similar way. The patience of God is extraordinary, and only the quiet unfolding of the years reveals it. Seneca, one of the finest of the Stoics, confessed the weakness of his Stoicism and pleaded with a pathetic cry, "None of us has strength to rise, and O that some one would stretch out a hand." In the slow unfolding of the years, One did come with a Hand stretched in love, helping us, lifting us out of our ignorance to understand the patient love of God.

The Divine Voice sometimes speaks in thunderous tones as it did at Sinai and at Calvary, and in the prophets ; but for the most part it comes in whispers to listening ears.

1. Time whispers the Judgments of God.

Jerusalem was Ariel, that is, the Hearth of God. We cannot separate hearth from home, nor can we think of home without the individuals forming it. The voice of God keeps whispering to every dweller in a good home the things that are purest and best. If one member of the family does not listen or hearing does not heed, the whispering of time still goes on trying to arrest and bring the wanderer back to purity and strength.

In the Castle of Simonetta in Italy there is a famous echo. It repeats a note or warning sixty times. In some men's lives the echo of the voice of God is repeated six times sixty and still there is no response. It is repeated like an echo, quietly, in several ways. Many hardly know what Christ means. He is too often an echo from a far away Sunday School and only an echo of Christ's life. His voice is repeated by the unselfish Christian lives of others in the home. It is repeated in the whispered prayers of a mother for a wilful girl running for a fall. It is repeated in God's word and message from every pulpit. How often it is repeated God alone knows !

The selfish man hears it whispering that his heart is getting like flint. The sensual man hears it, and yet his soul is becoming scorched and blasted and rotten. The ruffian has heard its deep moaning call for years and years, and still he is wronging widows and betraying orphans ; yet time and God whisper of a judgment to come. As a rule, the Divine Voice goes on quietly, and only once in a while does the thunder and lightning of Almighty wrath come down as at Sodom. God's judgments are not like man's. If they were, we should have more lynching and less justice. The retributive doom of divine judgments goes on and on almost in a whispering

silence. Yet let us not forget that the judgments of God are there.

2. Time whispers the Sympathies of God.

Some writers of the Narrow School would have us believe that compassion came only at the Incarnation, but while it came in its fullness then, it was there from the beginning of the ages. The spirit of Christianity came to earth long before the Son of God was born at Bethlehem. The coming of Jesus in the flesh was the completest expression of the compassion of God, but the heart of God was full of compassion from the beginning of time. It whispered its mystic language in Greece, its strong culture in Rome, its mercy in India. God's sympathy came like a whispering angel in all these countries to every one who heard it. It looked on Life, it looked on Death; it pitied, it sorrowed and it smiled, because from the very beginning its fountain lay deep in the heart of the Father. He seldom intimates His mercies by a trumpet call. Seldom are they heralded in a storm burst of love as at Bethlehem and Calvary.

Oftener they enter our lives, sweeten our tempers, urge us to hope and entice us to prayer so quietly that we hardly realise the Hand that has blessed us. It is mostly like the words of Jesus, the

eternal expression of God's compassion soft and low.

“ It may blow north, it still is warm ;
Or south, it still is clear ;
Or east, it smells like a clover farm ;
Or west, no thunder fear ! ”

And we take it all as a matter of course and seldom whisper our thanks for all His deep compassion into the ears of a merciful God.

3. *Time whispers God's deepest Love.*

“ Ho ! Ariel,” says Isaiah, “ city where David encamped. I will beleaguer you. I will besiege you close ; yet shall be to me as an Ariel.”

Ariel means God's own hearth and altar as well as God's shrine and the home of His love. The Home is the hearth, the abode of love and worship, or ought to be. Love is not always expressed or voiced or even whispered, but the wife knows it is there. The husband, the son, and daughter do not proclaim it often, but wife and mother know that it permeates the heart and shines over the life. Ephemeral passion proclaims its love from the housetops ; it is only mythical, not real. Real love which is known in family life is silent, but it is real, sacred, and lasting. Words need not be used, indeed acts express it better.

A young man told me recently that he never heard one unkind word uttered between his father and mother. That was love acted and realised in their lives, though unexpressed. I had heard of a mother not long before who worried herself into a serious illness because of the callous neglect and ingratitude of her sons. They will no doubt proclaim their love when she lies in the coffin. To those who know, it will proclaim their hateful indifference.

When God speaks to us of love and worship, He may not even whisper ; He may use no words at all. When God is in the heart, words are not necessary. The more intimate two friends are, the less they need to express it. The very presence of the one is speaking in a wordless language to the other that both understand.

To the impenitent, the wanderer, the outcast, and the backslider, the love of God must be proclaimed loudly, earnestly, with voice and pen, and word and act, but generally the Spirit whispers it quietly into the soul. Jesus is the highest expression of the love of God, and yet how quietly He came and very few knew Him when He came. Mary the blessed Mother whispered His coming to Elisabeth, and God gave His Son to humanity, His highest love to man.

Jerusalem wandered and grew selfish, but it was

Ariel still, the hearth of God, and He never forsook it. Wander we do and grow cold we may, but we are God's creatures, we are part of the hearth, the home of God. In some way He lives in us, loves us, and keeps whispering in our hearts all the way. Time never ceases to whisper His faithfulness ; and shall the heart of man be silent to the eternal love of God ?

“ Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”

NEGLECTED WARNINGS

"For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected : for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

(HEB. xii. 17.)

XIX

NEGLECTED WARNINGS

IN John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding" he tells in thrilling language how his soul was wrung by doubts, born of these strange, dark words. Perhaps it is only the few who really care for the things that are unseen and spiritual ; still there are the few who care and think and resolve to get into, and remain in, a right attitude to these sacred things that undoubtedly matter. To such earnest, seeking minds, this passage, and other like passages of Holy Writ, cause, as they did to Bunyan, deep searchings of heart. They wonder if it could be possible for an earnest seeker and a penitent soul who yearns and prays to be accepted of God, and cleansed from past unworthiness, to be spurned and rejected, and driven at last from the haven of mercy.

The passage before us is one that must have given grave concern to many. A little knowledge is often a dangerous thing, and pagans and sceptics who reject both Theism and Christianity with

very limited knowledge of the Scriptures, make statements regarding these that are utterly foreign to the truth. "He was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears," says the writer of this letter to the Hebrews.

The Authorised Version, which we have before us, appears to make "it" refer to the place of repentance, but the Revised Version, which is truer to the original, puts the words, "for he found no place of repentance," in parentheses. This draws the first and last clauses of the verse into closer connection, and would appear to make it refer to the blessing. The whole difficulty lies in the meaning of the parenthetical clause, "He found no place of repentance." Repent, in the highest religious sense of deep sorrow for sin, and turning from it to God, Esau never did. Repent, in its lowest sense of regret, that he rejected a magnificent opportunity, and despair, that it was beyond his reach and could never be recalled, he certainly did, and he wrung his hands and tore his hair and cried his eyes out in furious wrath and ruefulness, but it was wasted emotion, for it was too late. He changed his mind as to the value of the thing he had lost and the stupidity of the act he had done; and rampant desires to get it back tortured him as he sought to reclaim

it, but that could never be, it was beyond recall. That was the kind of repentance Esau had, and so the writer says, "He found no place of repentance."

The blessing could have been his but he undervalued it, and even despised it. He had his voluptuous desires gratified, and many intrigues among the Canaanites, but they were not all they were written up to be, and they let him down; and he began to see that his old father's blessing, which carried in its train faith in God, decent living, Divine friendship, and progenitor of a race from which the Christ would spring, was infinitely better than the vulgar licentiousness of the Canaanites. The values were reversed, but there is no indication of a real sorrow for sin, or of a heart turning to God. He missed the reward and he regretted it, and he wept and raged and howled in bitter despair, but it was all no use, for it was too late; the blessing was given to another, and nothing can bring back to the wheel the waters that are past and lost.

We may make sure of this, that the words of the text do not mean that any one who desires to turn to God and does turn to Him will be rejected. We know that the whole tenor of Scripture tells the other way, and yet there is a terrible reality in the words. The truth is perfectly clear in this

passage and many others, and it is written in the pages of history and on the heart of humanity, that if a man lets slip the blessing God puts within his reach, rejects some great opportunity, wastes the warnings that life gives to him, a day will come when they will be out of reach, beyond grasp, and never again will he have the same blessings and opportunities that he has rejected or neglected or lost.

When Jesus took with him Peter and James and John to help Him face His agony in the quiet garden of Gethsemane, He had a right to expect them to stand the test of friendship in that hour of anguish, but they did not. Instead of watching with Him, they fell asleep in the hour of crisis and opportunity. Asleep when a false friend was coming stealthily to betray Him with a kiss. Asleep when their Master was calling them to watch while His anguish was mingled with the agony of blood. Asleep! Asleep! Do you think that these three lovers of Him would not burn with shame, and hang their heads, and pine with self-abasement to their dying day, whenever they recalled that neglected opportunity and wasted hour in yon lurid garden of sorrow?

Human life is rich, and laden with occasions and chances, when individuals are tested and trusted. God gave life to man that he might use

it to its fullest capacity. It is full of ugly swamps and pitfalls and rare "Lotus" lands as well. It is easy to escape the abyss and spurn the ugly, but Castles in Spain allure, and things beautiful and fascinating, although known to be dangerous, are not easy to refuse. In the West Indies there grows a tree called the Manchineel. It is very beautiful, and it bears a golden apple. Its scent is fragrant and the fruit is most tempting, but to eat of it is certain death. The sap of the tree even is poisonous. The Indians dip their arrows in its sap and make death on their enemies.

The young especially are warned to avoid the swamps and refuse the fruit, however beautiful, of the tree of the Manchineel, but let us not forget that men and women have far more opportunities to make or mar their lives. Life is given us by God, with all its beautiful thoughts, and purposes, and ideals, and capacities for enjoyment, and powers to exercise influence. The Author of life is warning us to make a right use of it, and when the crisis comes and the scent of the Manchineel floats on the breeze, and all our lower feelings urge us to accept, the soul, which is God's spark of light, reveals the right course to pursue, and the high influence to exert, and the true path to take; if we take it not, and grasp not this opportunity for a higher life that God

has given us, the crevices of time will re-echo with the misery of our choice.

Sometimes in human story a career is made or lost by the use or abuse of even one great opportunity. It is recorded in History that Napoleon signalled to his general at Waterloo, these ominous words—"Too late, the critical hour has passed." The same interpretation echoes from the garden, when the traitor comes at midnight with torches fluttering in the gloom, and the Son of man with pathetic reproaches says to the three, "Sleep on now, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed." That neglect could never be recalled. They could find no place for repentance.

Life attains its fullest grandeur and highest worth when we realise that all that human life contains—work, position, influence, power, choice—are gifts, great gifts of responsibility for which, in the best sense, we must give an account to the Lord of Life. It is hopeless when parents have not felt this divine stewardship in regard to their children, and when teachers forget this in imparting knowledge to innocent young lives. These great motives are to many like a mere shadow and an ethereal dream, and if it be like that, is it any wonder that men despise the blessing and throw away the birthright?

In ancient writings called Palimpsests the old writing was erased in the parchment for economy's sake and the scribe would write again where the old had been. In the course of years the old would reappear and the strange result of two inscriptions instead of one. The old words spoiled the manuscript ; they rose, unwanted, to condemn and confuse. It would be a dreadful thing if wasted days and neglected opportunities should arise out of the past like big ugly words to condemn us like those on the Palimpsest, as they did in Esau's life. It is best to waste not our warnings and opportunities along life's way.

To leave off the claims of God to a deathbed is despicable. It may mean a saved soul, but it tells the bitter story of a lost life.

Men are called to the highest life ; and the highest type of life can only be lived when the soul is touched by the spirit of God, and a new voice is heard, and powers come to the heart in harmony with the eternal, and the soul is kept strong when tuned to love divine. That is the faith which saves from bitter regrets and wasted warnings. The faith that fears neither life nor death nor all the windings of earth's ways.

" I steadier step when I recall
That though I slip, He cannot fall."

THE SOUL'S SAFEGUARDS

*" I saw in the visions of my
head upon my bed, and, behold,
a watcher and an holy one came
down from heaven."*

(DAN. iv. 13.)

XX

THE SOUL'S SAFEGUARDS

THE book of the Prophet Daniel is tragic and moving. Few can understand it, and many are the interpretations given to passages and prophecies, but I am not going to burden your mind with these. It is enough for our purpose to explain that King Nebuchadnezzar had visions and dreams, and these were sent as a warning to wean him away from his evil and cruel ways. Into these visions holy beings entered to watch as well as warn. In this case they were sent to warn the king of coming disaster, for when Daniel was called in to interpret his dream, he told him to take warning by these visions to "break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, and maybe there will be a lengthening of his tranquillity."

There are undoubtedly spiritual beings or holy guides at the door of every life ; they warn men against evil courses and guide them on the better way. Every man knows in his own heart that

if life is to be made worthy, there are tendencies in the world without, and eager evil desires in the world within which must be kept in check, and the problem is how to do it. No one at the start wants to make life a vain meaningless wreck; and in times of stress and passionate longings for things that destroy, it is good to know that there are watchers within and without—call them angels, guardsmen, sentinels, or what you like—always there, ready to ward off the bitterest enemy even to life's final fight.

Many people are afraid in the night time. When the night falls down and the sunlight is hidden, aggressive evil emotions and influences are readiest to disturb the peace and haunt the soul of man. When there is any deep care tugging at a mother's heart, or tearing round a father's mind, it becomes more intensive and burdensome when sound has ceased and the night is still and the head is laid on the pillow. Imagination can be recklessly extravagant when the lights are out.

Questions arise about health, doubts regarding ability to carry out life's responsibilities, fear of failure to keep moving with honour all the home's necessities, and many other fears crowd at times in the "visions of the head" through the dark watches of the night-time. Solomon

kept within his palace walls six hundred armed men with sword on thigh to guard and keep him safe in sleep. "I saw," said the writer, "upon my bed, a watcher, an holy one came down from heaven." The children sing—

" Kind angels guard me every night,
As round my bed they stay.
Nor am I absent from thy sight
In darkness or by day.

We are all children in the eyes of the Heavenly Father ; and if men could but realise when these strange temptations and anxieties and misgivings crowd around them in the night watches that the all-seeing Father cares and He has placed

Spirituality as a Guardian Angel

over the life that trusts Him. Human life is often made fearsome by what is around it. Material things loom largely on the landscape of vision. They sometimes become tyrannical in their intriguing methods, but they are not everything. They have their place and must always have it because life has a physical side, and God has given these for our pleasures. We could not have beautiful words of comfort and fellowship and friendship spoken to us without a tongue to utter sound and lips to articulate. Nor could

men have beautiful food without willing hands to toil and strive. And we could never have known the sweet mother-smile of her who still lingers in memory had we not seen that face lit up with eyes of love. These are all material and physical and are necessary up to a point. They are part of the vast machine of nature, but not the all of life. They are symbolical only of things infinitely greater. The trouble comes when men make them everything. Then they get the mastery over the mind which is of much greater importance than matter, and this opens the door to a thousand little cares and troubles that are magnified to abnormal proportions. These all pass away like mists before the morning when the guardian angel hovers around and tells one that life is spiritual: that eternity is placed in every throbbing heart. When a man has faith to see that life belongs to God, that behind and beneath all physical matter is the eternal spiritual soul, then the holy angel comes to impress the truth that there is spiritual sovereignty above all material life. To have this consciousness that above and beneath and overruling all matter and might and monetary values there is a divine spiritual thing throbbing in the heart, is a strong support and a beneficent angel guarding all life's way.

Memory carries me back to the 30th June of 1917, to the gun pits near Festubert, where I was speaking to the men from this very text. A call from headquarters came suddenly and the men had to rush to the guns, but they came back unscathed and the service was carried out to the end. I had told them that holy watchers can guard the soldier on the battlefield and the dear ones at home in the hour of deepest need.

Whatever else we may forget, do not let us blot out the truth that our life is spiritual and we are made in the image divine. It is far too precious for shell or bomb, or bullet, or even death to destroy. These brutal things cannot destroy the real life because it is spiritual and eternal and Jesus died to redeem it and raise it up above all nameless things that irritate, to the Gates of Gold, where no anxious care can live because the angel of faith keeps watch and whispers in the midst of strife.

“ Peace, sweet peace, struggling soul.
Waves, hills and stars will say, seek not
To walk by sight.
By faith take all thy stumbling steps,
Through day and night
In God's control,
Peace, struggling soul.”

God has placed over this spiritual life conscience as *guard of moral truth*.

If life is spiritual and eternal, it is exceedingly precious and must be watched. The more precious a thing is, the more carefully is it kept and protected. The more valuable and beautiful a rose is, the more care and attention does the rosarian give it, to guard it from frost and danger. Lovers of rare and lovely orchids never cease to protect and save them from the little ailments that come again and again. So it is with rich and precious jewels. Reason prompts men to exert special care over the things that are superior or transcendently good or beautiful. But even in animal life, where reason cannot prompt, instinct comes to the rescue. A butterfly will not suck nectar from flowers that are poisonous, however beautiful they seem. In human life there is placed in every breast the moral instinct. *Conscience* is placed in every life as an angel to guard the soul. It is placed there by Him who made life spiritual.

Comte, the French philosopher, seeks to answer every question and satisfy all human aspirations in a scientific system of "worldliness." It cannot be done and every one knows it. Material sensations, which are often right and legitimate, eventually clog, as every sensualist finds out in

the end. Above and beneath, and running through every life, there are aspirations, longings, desires, and intuitions, that nothing earthly can satisfy. The "worldliness" of Comte and the cravings of bodily sense are far too ephemeral and passing to satisfy the deep and eternal longings of the soul.

These aspirations can be met and satisfied only by One who created them, by the Christ who died to regenerate man's life and satisfy our longings as nothing else can do. God, the Creator, meant man to be the victor over every foe and the moral angel is placed at his side to guard him. Milton says that "he who reigns within himself, and rules passions, desires and fears, is more than a King." The man who dallies with evil is done for. Let us listen then to the whisperings of conscience and heed the moral angel keeping watch over all the things that count the highest in the end. Every true man or woman knows how grand and strong is this guardian—strong to meet the hidden enemy till all earth's fights are won.

You will remember reading in the book of Daniel that when the Hebrews were in the fiery furnace, One, like unto the Son of man, drew near and delivered them. That one is the deathless Guardian, the Holy One who came from God to

guide our erring footsteps till we reach the eternal Home.

When one believes in the spirituality of life and its moral aims and resolves, and knows that it is guarded by One who is higher than material things and reigns over all fleeting chance and change, the work and the pleasures of life become sacred and full of hope, and doing one's duty is neither vain nor unblessed. That is the faith taught to us by Christ our Lord.

“ It lies not on the sunlit hill, nor on the sunlit plain,
Nor ever on any running stream, nor on the unclouded
main,
But sometimes thro' the soul of man, slow moving
o'er his pain,
The moonlight of a perfect Peace floods heart and
brain.”

Sometimes ! Sometimes only ? Nay, always to the child of God, for these holy angels, divine guardians, shall guard his palace of life against all earth's strife, till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

THE PERMANENCE OF DIVINE
PROMISE



*" There was a rainbow round
about the throne."*

(REV. iv. 3.)

XXI

THE PERMANENCE OF DIVINE PROMISE

THERE is such an attitude as that of making a fetish of tradition, and a shibboleth of an exaggerated conservatism. The Pharisees did that. They magnified jots and tittles, made mole-hills into mountains, while the real inwardness, the actual meaning, was lost.

There were, however, among the Jewish people some great men, who had the ability to retain the marvellous achievements of their nation and passed them on untarnished to generations yet to follow.

The Pharisees held that any change was sinful and they retained what was bad as well as good in the past, making evil traditions into permanencies. Such an attitude was a deathblow to progress and blinded men's eyes to the beauty and grace and freshness of the teaching of Jesus when He appeared.

The law of persistence—the law that would retain all that is best in our past history—is truly conservative, for it conserves what is greatest

in the past, that it may spur men on to splendid progress and future achievement.

The nations which have become greatest were evolutionists—not revolutionists. They endeavoured to make permanent the goodness and greatness of the past, and out of these traditions they evolved characteristic steadfastness and progressiveness which make nations really great.

It is not long since a controversy raged in a well-known paper over what is called the "Scottish Sabbath," and its method of observance. Extreme views both for and against were expressed. It is not necessary to state them fully. It may be sufficient to say in relation to my subject that there was something high and noble about the old Scottish observance of the Sabbath Day.

The men who lived and fought for freedom in days of old loved their Bible, worshipped their God, and served Him in the manner they considered right in their time. If they drew their blinds it was to shut out, not God's beautiful light, but the superstitions that were so rampant then, and to shut themselves in with spiritual things, to learn of God and obey His will.

As long as that spirit was retained and conserved it was magnificent, but when it was gone and men began to veneer that attitude like the Pharisees of old, and shut out all joy and love in

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the outward observance of God's Holy Day, it became hurtful and led to hypocritical and deceitful practices.

Whatever was truly great in the Scottish observance of the Sabbath Day should be conserved and made permanent; and not one of us can deny that the worship of God and quiet rest on the seventh day are extremely good for man and beast and machinery. These fine things should be retained. "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day, and hallowed it." That was the spirit in which our Scottish ancestors kept the Sabbath, and surely it was a good spirit, for it produced character of sterling worth.

Progress or evolution was inevitable, and since these old days we have discovered steam, electricity, petrol, radio, and other marvellous things, and in the light of these it is impossible to retain the same outlook on the world and worship and Christianity that many of our ancestors had; but if with this varied and enhanced outlook we could make permanent the spirit of reverence and worship they held, then with our enlarged views on Christianity and social progress and the desire for greater achievements in the higher,

spiritual, godlike things, nothing but good could result. Whilst that spirit is conserved, no true believer, young or old, should be offended by the Scottish observance of the Lord's Day.

The ancient Jewish Church retained the Pass-over feast all through her history, not exactly as it was originated, but it was really observed till our Lord's time, and out of it He evolved what has been the greatest blessing to mankind everywhere—the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He made that old feast of the Jews which was a festival of holy commemoration for deliverance from Egyptian bondage, a permanent blessing in His Church.

Long ago when the world was young the race was destroyed by a flood : yet something became permanently good out of that catastrophe. It was a promise for all future time made by the eternal God, that never again would the world be ruined by a flood of water, and as a sign of His faithfulness to that promise He set His bow in the cloud—the rainbow.

When John Keats the poet was dying he asked his friends to write upon his tombstone in the little Churchyard at Rome, " Here lies one whose name was writ in water." Keats thought mistakenly that His memory would have no permanence. The world was destroyed by water, yet

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the sun's rays in the drops of water made the rainbow—the symbol of a promise that would endure for ever.

Long, long years after the bow appeared in the clouds on earth one of Christ's apostles was banished across the salt waters to Patmos. He felt lonely, weary, forsaken. He was very human and felt the need of signs and symbols. We all do at times. Even the saints had doubts and falls, but they had learned where to look for permanency. It was not on earth, it was not in men, it was not in their own lives. Many of us might write of ourselves as a poet long since sang of Greece, "An empty urn within her withered hands whose holy dust was shattered long ago." The Apostle John discovered that, amid all changing things, the divine promise was eternal.

A Vision came to him at Patmos. A voice called to him, and he saw an open door and entered heaven in spirit: and behold a throne was set in heaven and John was afraid. Then fear fell from his heart because One he loved was sitting on the throne, and round about Him who sat upon the throne was a rainbow; and there came from the throne lightning and thunders and voices, but there was no fear in his soul, for he saw the rainbow—the symbol of a covenant with God, a promise made long ago to mankind—and John

knew that God was faithful, for he saw the rainbow round the throne.

After the flood Noah's heart was overwhelmed at the sight of rain. God had to reassure him, and He stamped on the very thing that frightened him, the symbol of eternal goodness; and while eating his heart out on the lonely island, the beloved disciple sees in vision the rainbow bent round the throne of God. It was a fresh pledge of the old covenant of the Almighty's faithfulness.

The reading of history is largely a reading of biography. The Bible is a series of marvellous biographies, and that is why it is so good for us. It tells us of men who speak to us across the centuries whom God made use of, and to whom He was faithful. Over all the gay moods of youth and the laughter of girlhood there is often desperate pessimism. I have heard a boy of twenty say, "I wish I had never been born." He said it because he did not realise that others have passed through similar agonies. It is through the knowledge of the doings of men and women who made history that people who are wise can hear sacred voices whispering through the leaves in June, and can see faces peering out of the dying embers of the winter fires, speaking to them, assuring them of the absolute constancy of the divine faithfulness.

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The man who has read of others' struggles and others' troubles will not wish for death in a fit of despondency, because their lives—sometimes shadowed, yet oftener sunlit by unfaltering love—testify to the fidelity of Him who has hung the rainbow round the throne.

“Lead me, O God,
Trusting, I know not where—
Save that it be where Christ has trod,
And left Love's prints, like wayside lilies fair.”

We do not understand the rainbow in the days of childhood. It has puzzled thousands of children with its secrets and its complexities. They wonder at its beautiful colouring, seek to catch its glittering beams, find the spot where it starts and where the rainbow ends. But the years do not teach us all the secrets the rainbow holds. Is it not, therefore, a symbol of life's perplexities?

Life is the biggest problem man can ever face. It has never yet been solved. A man may live for a hundred years and may understand much about life and its reasons and results, but will he ever solve its mysterious beginning and the pathetic enigma of its ending? It is much too complex for mere human solution.

When life's temptations and fevers fall heavily

on men, and its pains and sorrows creep, like a blinding mist, around the hearts of women, and leave their "earthly damps" behind, the world becomes filled with perplexity to them.

To children and unenlightened people the rainbow is a mystery, but more advanced knowledge reveals that it is light merely split up into its constituent parts by the crystal raindrops. To novices among the hills mists bring fear and uncertainty, but to an experienced shepherd it brings no fear, for he knows the hills and where the precipices lurk and the caverns lie: and he has learned by experience that by patiently waiting the mists will disperse and the sun will shine again.

When the mists of life's sorrows and disasters and death fall thickly on those who do not know God and have learned nothing about His dealings, despair and hopeless dismay gather around their hearts. Whereas to the man who trusts his God and has had experience of His wonderful love and sheltering care in the hour of trial, there is no wasting anxiety, for like the experienced shepherd on the hills, and Noah in devastating rains, he sees in all life's perplexities the refuge of an unchanging God; and in every mystery there is written the perpetual assurance of the rainbow.

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“ We see but dimly through the mists and vapours ;
Amid these earthly damps,
What seem to us but sad funereal tapers
May be heaven’s distant lamps.”

God sets His rainbow over all life’s clouds.

The divine promises are therefore to the Christian heart permanent and unchangeable ; and could we but look by faith beyond earth’s clouds into the home of God, we should see the rainbow—symbol of unfailing mercy and forgiveness, and pledge of Christ’s love and redeeming grace.

**RANSOMED FOR HIGHER
SERVICE**

*" Jesus Christ, who gave
Himself for us, that He might
redeem us from all iniquity, and
purify unto Himself a people,
for His own possession (R.V.),
zealous of good works."*

(TITUS ii. 14.)

XXII

RANSOMED FOR HIGHER SERVICE

THE dwellers in the island of Crete had great reason for gratitude. Paul the apostle had laboured there, and the new fresh life of the faith of Christ had broken through the fossilised habits of vice that had long kept the islanders in bondage. He had told them of a love that had won his heart in youth's glow, and of a power that had kept him straight and strong in all the battles he had fought. The love and power that had won and kept the hero heart of Paul were bringing the same blessings and were working in the lives of the Cretans a wonderful transformation.

The gallant man who had formed the Church in Crete was now burdened with the weight of years and suffering, and well he knew his earthly days should soon be over, but the faith of Christ must be firmly established. So Titus the young minister was appointed to the oversight of the Church of Crete. This beautiful letter was

written to him at the end of Paul's life. It is replete with illuminating touches and the hand of experience is traced on every page.

This exponent of the free grace of God affirms with perfect frankness that Jesus of Nazareth gave His life, not only to save but redeem from all iniquity—"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Some are woefully disappointed with the results of Christianity; but many have false expectations and are ignorantly wanting many things never written in the bond. One man who has an incurable disease, expects the power of Christ to touch him, and he is disappointed because the years pass and healing has not come, but those who have looked steadfastly at sacred things know that contact with Christ is intended to restore and revitalise the soul, the spiritual part—not necessarily the body, the material part. Others are dissatisfied that the precepts of Christianity have not swept away all poverty, class distinctions, unhealthy conditions of living, slums and starvation wages. They expect a new Jerusalem on earth, but forget that it can come only when Heaven is enthroned in the hearts of men and women.

Christ is no partisan. He is neither communist, nor labourist, nor liberal, nor conservative *per se*, for He is above politics and class and section ; but He is in every one of these when His Spirit is in the heart of the exponent of any of these causes, and not till then. He came to cleanse the heart of man, and when He is allowed to master the human heart, the world will be changed and the new Jerusalem will come down to the dwellings of men, for He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works. That is to say, the evils of life everywhere must be attacked and are always attacked when Christ enters the heart.

All true men and women touched by the flame of love divine want better conditions for each and every family compelled to exist in squalid, drab surroundings ; but these cannot be purchased always by more money or more leisure. These alone cannot redeem man, for it is not exceptional to see houses, where abundance of money comes in every week, the picture of wretchedness and poverty. We want social betterment everywhere, but it is not quite enough to redeem man. The character and life must be changed from within. If selfishness and hate and intemperance are allowed to master the life,

the home will never be anything but a hell, though the house be full of gold.

What we need in every class is not more comfort and pleasure, but better character and more of God's grace in every life. When that state comes there will be neither revolution by the workers, nor oppression on the part of the employers. The influence of Christ and all He stands for can put this spirit of vital fairness into the heart of every class of society, and dispel the spirit of suspicion and hatred that have done so much to breed unemployment and wellnigh ruin our country during the last few years, for He unselfishly sacrificed Himself for us all, of every race and class, to redeem us from all sin and selfishness and iniquity.

The idea in this passage is the purchase of the slave from bondage, of paying a price to give him liberty, a liberty which is not freedom to destroy, or molest, or kill others. It is rather a recognition of obedience to the highest law.

No human being is free to do anything he likes. True liberty owes a duty to the State that has nurtured us, to fellow mortals among whom we must live, and to one's own sense of right. No one is completely free from relationships and obligations ; otherwise he should be an automaton and not a man. There is always the higher

law that true freedom must recognise. When we recognise a higher duty and choose it in preference to a lower bondage, that is freedom. When we choose a vice instead of a virtue, that is slavery to the lowest order. Some prisoners do not want to be freed ; they dread freedom. The world is hard and bare and cold and they dread it, until a new knowledge, a fresh impetus, or some impelling motive is awakened in the prisoner's soul—a something that will arouse desire and hope.

There is a good deal said nowadays about the new psychology and auto-suggestion. It is no new truth that the mind has tremendous power over the body and its desires and emotions. These creeds may be very helpful in arousing fresh interests and new purposes for mind control ; yet there is something infinitely greater needed when a life is down and out, dispirited and shattered. It is the assurance of the living Christ, of One full of love and power and forgiveness. It was the personality of Jesus that lifted Paul, on the Damascus road, out of his hate and bigotry and sin and awoke in his slumbering soul new desires and hopes for the future, because his mind was centred on a Personality and a Will that could never fail him—the will of God. It was the omnipotence of the Son of God, Essence

of the Almighty, that gave him the needed strength and kept him steadfast till the last earthly shadow closed around his dying heart.

The ordinary individual does not care much about the theories of the atonement and their theological bearing, but he does follow the fact of it when you tell him that Christ died on the Cross for love of us, to atone for our sin and to purchase our salvation. To realise that, He let His precious life be sacrificed and His body be shattered to save the world and lift it from sin and folly and despair—that is a kind of atonement the plain man can understand.

He is part of our life because He gave Himself for us. Love only will sacrifice its interests for another. Mother-love will save the child at the expense of her own life. That is an attitude we all understand; and when one who saw the Christ and heard His words and felt His power, speaks to us in a wooing personal note of the Man of Calvary and says, "He loved me and gave Himself for me;" we are confident that the love that suffered so much has the power to save the slave from evil passion and the prisoner from his crime; and we believe that no sinister force can overmaster one into whose heart has come the living Christ, for there is always on his side the sovereignty of redeeming grace, for He gave

Himself to redeem us from all iniquity. There is therefore no crisis in which He cannot hear and help and save.

“ He clears the grounding berg
And guides the grinding flow,
He hears the cry of the little kit fox
And the lemming of the snow.”

The whole design of Christ's life on earth, and His sacrifice on the Cross, was to promote Christian living. The best and truest things we know of God have come down to us through Christ's words and acts and influence. A new light was thrown on Omnipotence. God was no longer a power ready to crush without mercy or reason or love. Jesus revealed Him differently. When He said, “ All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth : and lo, I am with you always,” we know that He was speaking both of the omnipotence and omnipresence of love—a love all powerful and ever present to lift these fretful nerveless contaminated lives out of fear and sin and despair up into an atmosphere where victory was certain.

On one occasion the “ Ironsides ” were being flung backward and were almost defeated, when Cromwell, their mighty General on battle charger, rode across the field. It had an instantaneous effect. It spurred them to new energy and

brought back to their hearts and hands a new courage, and they fought on and gained a splendid victory.

The babbling of the atheistic crowd would lead you to think that Christianity had failed, and not a few nerveless dispirited drones among Church members are like Cromwell's soldiers, almost at the point of collapse. That is because they are drones—not workers. It is when we are working for Christ and fighting His battles that the exalted Christ appears to us to strengthen heart and hand on the battlefields of Life. The Christless army that knows nothing of His real faith and teaching will fall back, cowards to the last, to ignominious defeat.

The secret of a victorious life is frankness with God. We need not expect victory in the life of faith and do nothing for Him, or take sides with the atheists and those who slander Christ, in the office, or workshop or market. A Mohammedan will never deny his faith under any circumstances. And are members of the Christian Church—the highest type of faith—ashamed of their leader and Lord?

We must either be frank with Christ or fail, either stand up for Him or fall into the snares of the devil. It is not a bit of use trying to serve both God and Mammon.

Ransomed for Higher Service 247

The power of Christ's life and death and resurrection are ours. Why then be afraid? He gave Himself that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works.

“ And have we wept
And have we quailed with fears,
Or shrunk with horrors, sure reward
We have whom knowledge crowns ;
Who see in mould the rose unfold,
The soul through blood and tears.”

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